

# Smart Chip from St. Petersburg

and other tales of a bygone chess era

**Genna Sosonko**



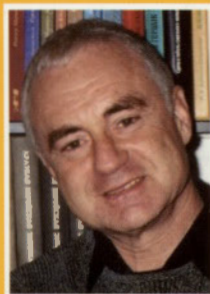
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Genna Sosonko lived for the first 29 years of his life in Leningrad. He emigrated to Holland in 1972 and became one of the strongest grandmasters in the world. His best-selling first book, *Russian Silhouettes*, was shortlisted for the world's premier chess book award, the BCF Book of the Year 2001. In 2003 Genna Sosonko published *The Reliable Past* to worldwide acclaim.



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# Smart Chip

Genrikh Chepukaitis (1935-2004)

The 1958 Leningrad Blitz Championship was won by Viktor Kortchnoi. Second place was shared by Boris Spassky, Mark Taimanov and a first-category player who had beaten all the grandmasters in individual encounters. The name of this first-category player was Genrikh Chepukaitis, a modest master in classical chess but a true grandmaster in blitz.

Born in Leningrad in 1935, Chepukaitis began playing chess at the age of 14. Although he did say that when he was in the army, he studied in Baku under Vladimir Makogonov, and when he returned to Leningrad he sometimes went to lessons by Furman and Borisenko, practice was his real teacher. He confessed: 'I found mastering all the subtleties boring and I soon gave up these studies. I didn't get a classical chess education. Blitz was my great and only trainer – I taught myself to find the right squares for my pieces as the seconds ticked away.'

Indeed, blitz became his passion and Chepukaitis spent days, weeks and months playing innumerable games. His results in other tournaments were far more modest, but he had few equals at speed chess.

When he became blitz champion of Leningrad for the first time in 1965, ahead of many titled players, Chepukaitis formally wasn't even a master. Although he had achieved his master norms, the qualifications commission decided not to award him the title after looking at his games – they found he wasn't quite ready. When in the following year Chepukaitis decided to play in the Moscow Blitz Championship, they didn't allow him directly into the final. He arrived on the night train, won the semi-final, spent the night on a bench in the train station, and the next day won a dazzling victory ahead of many famous masters and grandmasters.

In those years he played in Moscow Championships several times, and with success. He particularly proudly recalled the one

in which Tigran Petrosian did not take part. The veto came from Petrosian's wife Rona: 'You're the World Champion. Who will praise you if you win? And if you lose? It's fine if Bronstein, Tal or Kortchnoi beats you, but what if you lose to Chepukaitis?' Tal won that Moscow Championship, Chepukaitis came second ahead of Kortchnoi.

The Chigorin Club in his native city remained Chepukaitis's main and favourite battlefield. He played in the local blitz championship 47 times. Forty-seven times. He won on six occasions, the last time in 2002, when he was already long past 60. If he didn't happen to get through to the final, he would receive a personal invitation, as a blitz championship of the city without Chepukaitis was inconceivable.

On that day the spectators stood on the tables and window-sills of the club, not only because renowned grandmasters were taking part in the tournament, but because Genrikh Chepukaitis was playing, and he was capable of beating – and did beat! – those same grandmasters, Kortchnoi and Spassky, Tal and Taimanov. For him the day was a holiday, his personal holiday, and he appeared in the club clean-shaven, in a snow-white shirt and tie.

On these occasions his colleagues could be seen at the club, workers from the compression section of the optical-mechanical factory, where he worked all his life. It didn't matter that they barely knew how the chess pieces moved, they couldn't miss such a spectacle: their Chip had come to smash the grandmasters!

Chip. That's what everyone called him, and although in his last years he became Genrikh to some, and to young people also Genrikh Mikhailovich, everyone still called him Chip between themselves. Chip wasn't a professional chess player. All his life until he retired he worked as an electric welder: overalls, safety goggles to protect him from the spray of flying sparks, everything you'd expect. People who knew him in that capacity confirmed that he was a highly-qualified welder. He woke up at five in the morning, if he'd been to bed at all, to get to the factory



gates on time, and one could only be amazed that he could keep up this lifestyle: all his evenings, and very often his nights too, were filled with the game.

The game was what he lived for. He played everywhere: in the Chigorin Club, in the clubs of various palaces and houses of culture, and in the summer on the Kirov Islands, in the parks, and in the Holiday Garden. Supporters and admirers always crowded around his games; he liked playing in public and while his opponent was thinking about a move he would exchange a word or two with someone or calmly roll his next cigarette, paying no attention to his alarmingly hanging flag.

He often carried the wooden chess clock, the tool of his trade, around with him in a bag. In the machine gun fire on the clock the last shot always came from him, and sometimes the clock couldn't take such crazy cannonades and the button would fly off the body of the mechanism. Occasionally, by careless movements the clock was pushed out of place, like an ice hockey goal, pieces and pawns fell over, and instead of an attacking position there would be a chaotic pile of pieces of wood that had rolled all over the board.

I can easily picture him at that time: not very tall, with short, muscular arms, tiny eyes, a cheerful and cunning expression, and black, tousled, slightly curly hair with early touches of grey; almost always looking tired and droopy, in a laundered shirt and a dark, eye-catching jacket. Few people took him seriously – in his name itself there was something nonsensical, frivolous, and funny, like in the chess he played.

He could cheat during a game, but he did it cheerfully and without malice. One of his tricks was to turn opposite-coloured bishops into same-coloured ones in dead-drawn endgames. 'In this case under no circumstances must one rush,' Chip explained his strategy. 'After changing the colour of the bishop, I make dozens of pointless moves until my opponent notices the sharp transformation of the position on the board. And only after 'guiding' my partner into the new arrangement do I move on to decisive actions.' If his dumbfounded opponent, having lost all

his pawns, resigned in bewilderment, and, trying to reconstruct the course of events, said: 'Wait, wait, at the beginning, it was -', Chip, who had been refusing to budge for the sake of appearances, would cheerfully agree and set up the pieces for a new game.

There were numerous formulas for blitz: classical five-minute games, three- and even one-minute games, and various kinds of odds were also given. The most common one that Chepukaitis gave was one minute against five. On more than one occasion I have witnessed him playing with these odds against candidate masters, and they often asked that the 60 seconds of Chip's time be measured strictly on a stopwatch rather than by estimation on the chess clock – of course, there was no such thing as an electronic clock in those days.

Along with the amount of thinking time there were other important issues that had to be discussed before the start of the game, like which side of the players the chess clock would be on. To the uninitiated this question seems utterly idle. In fact, in a blitz game even the extra seconds it takes to reach a clock that is further away from your hand can make all the difference. Other conditions were also discussed, for example, whether the touch-move rule would be followed or if the move would be considered made only after the button on the clock had been pressed. Often a two- or three-game match would be played, known in the West as a rematch or 'best of three'. It goes without saying that there was always a bet on the game, but these bets could be completely outrageous, just like the rest of life at that time. At one sitting Chip could lose and win sums that were much higher than his monthly wage.

Once I witnessed a match between Chepukaitis and a candidate master, to whom Chip gave rook odds. In compensation his opponent was supposed to take away his c-pawn, which according to Chepukaitis's theory had exceptional significance, as the centre could only be undermined with the help of this pawn. His belief in himself was boundless. It was not for nothing that he said: 'You must be absolutely confident in yourself. When you're

playing a game, you have to be aware of who is the most resourceful at the board. It's you. You yourself.'

Watching him play, I saw that he didn't really like positions in which there was one single solution, preferring positions where several continuations were possible. He also played all kinds of card games, as well as dominoes and *shmen* – a not very difficult game in which the winner is the one who guesses the correct number of a large batch of banknotes in a clenched fist. He could 'roll' with any game, any time, with anyone, and people like him were known as 'rollers'.

In those days the time control in chess left room for meditation, and I sometimes saw Chip in some back room right in the middle of a game, playing cards or 'reviving himself' with *shmen*, while his deeply-thinking opponent was considering whether to place his king's rook or his queen's rook on d1.

Sometimes he could be found in the 'Leninist room' of the factory among other chess players who worked there. They would take the copies of *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* off the table, lock the door, deal the cards or set up the chess pieces, and open a bottle. They were playing under the watchful eye of Lenin, a bust of whom was an essential feature in any 'Leninist room'.

I recall a typical episode from those days. It was the summer of 1965 and at the Oktyabrskaya Hotel, Chepukaitis and the young Georgian master Roman Dzindzichashvili had decided to play a couple of three-minute games. They started in the afternoon and I left them in the middle of this. When I looked in at the hotel again the following morning, I could already hear the desperate tapping of the clock: the adversaries were still sitting at the table, only from time to time going out to the bathroom to stick their heads under the stream of cold water that was constantly flowing out of the tap. The opening positions appeared on their board with fabulous speed; not surprisingly, as these positions had occurred many times already in the previous games and – experienced blitz players will understand what I mean – they both set them up without much thought, like something that fell into place by itself.

'Somewhere around five in the morning I was eleven games up, but then Chip got a second wind and not only levelled the scores, but overtook me,' Dzin said of the struggle, 'but never mind, it's not evening yet, now I'm on plus four again.' An hour later, when I left them alone again, Chepukaitis had caught up...

Roman Dzindzichashvili, himself an outstanding blitz player, recalls that this was far from the only occasion when a single combat lasted so long: 'Once I played him for fifty hours straight.' Mark Tseitlin confirms that once he met Chepukaitis on a Friday and played blitz with him for three days in a row: 'The score went back and forth around plus three on one side or the other and the stake was a rouble per game, but once we'd started playing, we got into it and simply couldn't stop.'

Chepukaitis talked more than once about his head-to-heads with Mikhail Tal. The very first one took place in Leningrad, in a hotel; the elderly man that Chip met there, and whom he at first mistook for Misha's uncle, turned out to be Rashid Nezhmetdinov. Chepukaitis beat the master of combinations with a score of 5:2, after which Tal entered the room and got involved. He also played seven games and according to Chip lost almost all of them, although the following day he won a rematch.

True, on each occasion Chepukaitis gave a different score of this successful match, and now it's difficult to check the absolute accuracy of this story, but I myself witnessed the duels between Chepukaitis and Tal on more than one occasion and I can confirm that each of them won some of the battles. And so it was at the national championship in Kharkov in 1967. Chip would play his regular games at the speed of a hurricane as usual and, after quickly freeing himself, loitered about the hall, waiting for Tal. When Misha finished his game, the blitz began, often with a large crowd of spectators. I can testify that the overall score was about equal and there were no boring games.

Some people create trends in chess and others follow them. Chepukaitis didn't belong to either of these categories: he had his own opening theory, completely built out of his own games.

‘There are two kinds of openings,’ said Chepukaitis. ‘One that you play well and another that you play badly.’ He himself liked to create an irrational position right from the opening, chaos on the board, which he called a ‘bazaar’.

Chepukaitis’s favourite opening with the bishop coming out to g5 after a first move with the queen’s pawn was founded on his dislike of studying other, more solid openings. This was his favourite strategy: move this bishop out as soon as possible, exchange it immediately and start digging a trench for the other one.

In the artificial world of chess all the pieces were living beings to him, but the knight was his favourite. He admitted more than once, ‘I love knights, without knights chess would just be boring.’ What he didn’t call them – the elite of the fauna on the board, hunchbacks, horses, racehorses, geldings, nags. It wasn’t surprising that when he saw Deep Blue exchanging a bishop for a knight on the fourth move of a game in the New York match with Kasparov in 1997, Chepukaitis was delighted: ‘Finally the computer has begun to understand something about chess!’

Petrosian titled one of his articles ‘An opening to my taste, or why I like the move Bishop g5.’ ‘Petrosian campaigned for moving the bishop out on the third move, while I prefer to do it a move earlier,’ Chepukaitis said, lamenting that bringing the kamikaze bishop out to g5 on the first move was forbidden by the rules of the game. He called this thrust by the bishop the ‘mongrel opening’, arguing that other openings have ‘plenty in them that people are sick and tired of.’ The idea of this move was revealed with the greatest effect in a game between Chepukaitis and Taimanov at one of the city blitz championships, when after the moves 1.d4 d5 2.♙g5 his opponent, caught by surprise, played 2...e6. In the same instant the black queen disappeared from the board as if Chepukaitis hadn’t even expected any other move, and the grandmaster, pushing the pieces together, said angrily, ‘You should be selling beer, not playing chess.’

Chepukaitis believed that the thousands or tens of thousands of games he had begun in this way provided enough grounds to



name the opening after him. 'So what if some Trompowsky fellow made this move even before the war, all the ideas in this mongrel opening were worked out by me and me only,' Chepukaitis argued. But no one took his opening seriously in those days, and the part devoted to 2.♘g5 in the article on theory that Boris Gulko wrote after the 1967 tournament in Leningrad, where Chip used this move many times, was ruthlessly cut out by the editor of the magazine.

With the black pieces Chepukaitis played various systems with the fianchettoed dark-squared bishop, but of the openings he created his favourite was the 'rope-a-dope system'. In this system, where Black deliberately gives up the initiative to his opponent, White loses the benefit of any concrete theoretical recommendations and if he plays routinely, the spring in Black's position may be released as if all by itself. Depending on his mood he can use this defensive system as White too, directing fire onto himself.

There was clearly thought behind each of his moves and his play was full of original, unconventional ideas. Once, after he had sacrificed his queen for two minor pieces on move five as Black in a game with Zak in the Leningrad variation of the Nimzo-Indian Defence and literally routed him, Zak, after resigning the game, asked Chepukaitis nervously: 'You were toying with me, of course?' Years later in the Leningrad Palace of Pioneers Vladimir Grigorievich Zak, one of the trailblazers in this variation, would still analyse the position that had arisen in that game with Chepukaitis with amazement and disbelief.

In one of the rounds of the Leningrad Spartakiad of 1967 I was playing on the board next to Chepukaitis. During his game with Ruban Chip kept going out to the foyer to smoke and talk with friends, coming back to the hall only to quickly make his next move. I think that if he'd had the chance to play in American tournaments, where events with classical, rapid and blitz time-controls are often held at the same time, he would have run from hall to hall, playing a few games simultaneously, as, for example, the British grandmaster Bogdan Lalic does.

‘Did you see the show I put on today?’ I overheard Chepukaitis saying in the lobby after Ruban had resigned.

‘Was it all sound?’ he was asked.

‘Who knows, without a half-litre of vodka there’s no way to tell,’ Chip replied with a smile in his favourite way. This fantastic game, which today has been subjected to the merciless verdict of the computer, doesn’t stand the test of accuracy, but it still delights anyone who in chess appreciates more than just logical play in the opening and the exploitation of a small advantage in the endgame.

Once, in a discussion about the constantly shrinking amount of time allocated for thinking, Anatoly Karpov said that we might all end up playing blitz, and then Chepukaitis could become world champion. ‘Yes, he might,’ David Bronstein remarked, ‘and I don’t see anything wrong with that. Genrikh Chepukaitis is a magnificent strategist and a brilliant tactician. His countless victories in blitz tournaments are due to his uncommon skill in creating complicated situations, in which his opponents, who are used to ‘correct’ play, simply get lost.’

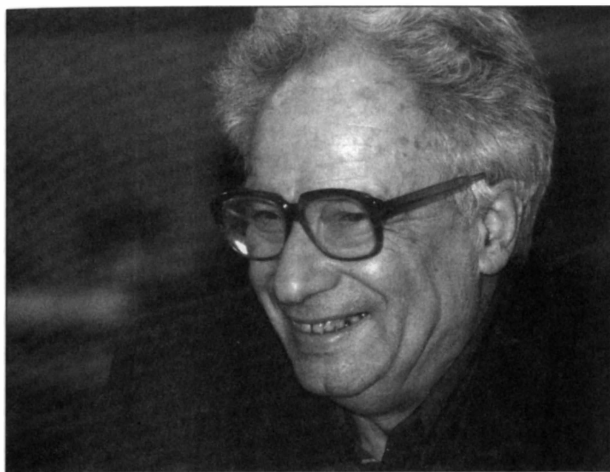
Several years before his death Chepukaitis wrote a book on speed chess, blitz, and how to play in time trouble. He formulated the main idea of the book very clearly: ‘There’s absolutely no need to play well, your opponent must play badly!’ He assigned a very important role to the atmosphere created during the game and the role of the adversary: ‘When you begin the game, you have 16 pieces of vastly varying values. But there is one that is much more significant than all the others – the 17th piece. This is your opponent. He is the one you must reckon with when choosing your moves. Above all you mustn’t prevent your opponent from making a choice. I try to present this choice to my partner and I very much hope that he will make the next blunder! He’ll find a way to lose if you don’t get in his way too much. A chess player is only a human being and he was born to make mistakes, to drop pieces and overlook things.’

In his book he wrote about what he considered dead weight in situations when there was limited time for thinking, that, 'kindness, bashfulness and carefulness are only needed to hide your true intentions. Pushiness, bluffing, adventurousness and shrewdness are essential, though. Being fearful, unsure of oneself, theoretical or panicky is unacceptable. Help your opponent lose his rhythm. Confusion is adequate compensation for a sacrificed piece. An occasional distant, irrelevant move can be a frightening weapon. Your conduct at the beginning of the game should follow a simple rule: clarity in the opening is more important than a material advantage.'

He wasn't looking for truth in the game, leaving this occupation to super grandmasters and the computers he so disliked; he was seeking only and exclusively his own rightness, called victory. In the search for his own rightness he had a limited number of seconds at his disposal, and I would suggest that an air traffic controller's reply to psychologists trying to find out what he thinks about in an emergency: 'There's no time to think, you have to see,' would be very dear to Chepukaitis's heart. And if you asked him what truth is in chess, he might reply in the words of a hero in Agatha Christie's novels: the truth is whatever upsets someone's plans.

Another essential piece of advice concerned the clock: 'Make your moves closer to the button on the clock. This is very important! Remember: your hands must be quicker than your thoughts. Don't move where you're looking and don't look where you're moving. This is a chance! If your opponent has forgotten to press the clock, make an intelligent face, as if you're thinking. As your opponent's clock is running, you're getting closer to victory. When you reach the endgame, make random moves, following the only rule: all your moves must be as close as possible to the button on the clock. Never forget Chepukaitis's button theory.'

Chepukaitis confessed that he had never managed to patch up serious gaps in the opening and endgame, only to camouflage these gaps. 'I don't understand serious chess and I consider my-



Genrikh  
Chepukaitis:  
'Was it correct?  
Who knows,  
without a  
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way to tell...'



'Chip' in a characteristic pose in a blitz game against Peter Svidler: pieces close to the clock, right hand already poised for the next move, before the opponent has even pushed the button of the clock.



Chip reciting one of his poems at the Chigorin Club in St.Petersburg in 2002, while Viktor Kortchnoi (left) is listening attentively.



Blitz was always extremely popular with St.Petersburg audiences. Here Boris Spassky (right) is playing Mikhail Tal in 1960.



self hopeless as a serious chess player,' he said more than once. This, of course, is an exaggeration, but indeed, the difference between Chepukaitis's results at blitz and in normal chess tournaments was striking – his rating never exceeded the modest 2420 mark. It is remarkable that for someone with the kind of talent that Chepukaitis had, time for plunging into contemplation was a negative force, leading to doubt, self-analysis and mistakes. This is a well-known paradox, characteristic of those who play by their animal instinct and their gut feeling: hesitation and doubt creep into the thought process, natural talent deserts them, and their play loses its originality.

Curiously, at the beginning of the seventies, when the curve of his tournament successes was climbing higher, his blitz results deteriorated. He admitted at the time: 'Before, I didn't understand anything and wasn't afraid, but now I know that you must not play this way and you mustn't play that way...' Moreover, he resolutely scorned any sensible lifestyle – he could arrive three-quarters of an hour late to a game, start the round after a sleepless night, and he never let go of his cigarette. But, like other people with such nervous systems, his body had a defence mechanism: he could switch off, even just for a few minutes, wherever he liked – in an underground train, on a park bench, or in an armchair in the foyer of the chess club.

Although by profession he was a worker, an electric welder, in reality he was, of course, a chess player, and games are the main part of a chess player's life. Original plans and amazing combinations sometimes sprouted from the scrap heaps of Chepukaitis's games. In his life he played hundreds of thousands of games, and almost all of them have sunk into oblivion, like the painting of an artist who, to avoid having to spend money on an expensive canvas, paints a new picture on top of an old one. Chepukaitis himself didn't worry much about preserving them, just like the Hungarian tycoon who went to a ball in boots embroidered with pearls that were fastened on so carelessly that they fell off during a waltz.

Chepukaitis was a man with a restless and original mind, utterly lacking the capacity for reflection and constantly active. He knew an extraordinary number of tall tales, anecdotes and yarns, and the truth in them was mixed with fiction, so it was for good reason that he admitted taking quite a bit from Baron Munchausen's stories for his own. He often repeated the stories, and after a quarter of an hour he would become tedious to listen to, but out of politeness no one interrupted him.

He wrote verse, terribly long poems, excerpts from which he would read to anyone who wished to listen. Although there were funny as well as sad lines in these poems, they were the typical work of a rhymester. While reading he made abundant use of mimicry and helped himself along with his intonations – it was obvious that this activity brought him pleasure. The poems were about chess, about his favourite piece on the chess board – the knight – about the 'mongrel opening', and about the grandmaster title, but most of all they were about him. Just as he was modest in his assessment of his abilities at serious chess, so he zealously guarded his reputation as a blitz player. Sometimes he spoke and wrote about himself in the third person, calling himself 'the legendary Chepukaitis'; but the most common word in his poems was 'I'.

To a psychologist, this need for self-affirmation and for proving his own superiority would probably be clear evidence of compensation for non-recognition of his contributions as an individual, real or imagined. After all, central to the game is the hunger to surpass others, to become the winner and in that role to receive honours. Although he achieved international master norms several times, and once he was close to becoming a grandmaster, he never received the official title, which is so faded, ground down and devalued today, and he felt hurt and passed over. This sense of grievance, a grievance for the non-recognition of his talent, is discernible in the last line of his book, printed in bold letters: **Master of sport of the USSR Genrikh Chepukaitis.**

It was also discernible in the inscription on the copy of the

book he gave me: to a friend and grandmaster. And in a quatrain of one of his poems:

*They haven't yet made me grandmaster  
Maybe after I die;  
Into the Guinness Book of Records  
I'll make my way up high.*

You can imagine how sweet it was for him to see on the tournament table for the Senior World Championship in Germany: GM Chepukaitis, when the organizers mistook the initials of Genrikh Mikhailovich for a title.

One of the humorous maxims that Chepukaitis's book is full of reads: 'I have noticed that men always marry the wrong women, and it's the same at the chess board – you make the wrong move – mistakes are unavoidable!' Chip knew what he was talking about. He was married five times, but this number should not be incorrectly interpreted: in fact he was very shy and susceptible, and when he fell in love, he always suggested making it 'legal'. But in life, as in chess, he was frivolous – when he and his second wife decided to split up, they simply threw away their registration certificates. When he was preparing his third marriage it came out that the previous one hadn't been dissolved and he was very nearly put on trial for bigamy. His last wife, Tanya Lungu, a chess player from Chisinau, was 33 years younger than him. His book is called *Sprint on the Chess Board*. In actual fact his whole life was a sprint, and he didn't pay much attention to false starts.

He admitted that he was a bad father to his two children, but when a boy whose surname was Chepukaitis came to the chess group at the Anichkov Palace a few years ago, confirming that he was the grandson of the famous Chepukaitis, the grandfather was indescribably proud when he heard about it.

When the walls around the national fortress came tumbling down, he travelled abroad several times, playing in Senior World

Championships in Europe. Many of the people with whom he had spent long years at the chess and card tables left for Israel, Germany and America. For a while he, too, thought about using his Jewish ancestry to emigrate to Germany. Chepukaitis was his mother's surname and in the ethnicity section on her passport she was described as a Pole.

Those who knew her recalled a woman with a characteristic face, an aquiline nose and curly, grey, formerly black hair. Genrikh Mikhailovich was also designated a Pole in his passport. The papers of his father, Mikhail Yefimovich Pikus, a Jew who had worked as a foreman in the Kirov factory before the war and perished at Stalingrad in 1942, have been preserved. But the marriage of Chepukaitis's parents wasn't registered, so there was no way he could prove anything 60 years later, and the idea of emigrating gradually melted away.

He had numerous acquaintances, chess and card players, blitz partners, drinking buddies, those who knew him simply as Chip, but he didn't have any close friends. In company he told his funny stories incessantly and for the better part of his life he had his favourite, well-worn records. Even as a young man he had had a tendency towards long monologues, and as the years passed he became even more verbose. An endless stream of words flowed out of him, and socialising with him wasn't easy; actually, he needed a listener more than he needed a conversation partner. There was chess in his flood of words, but mainly there was him, he himself, the untitled and unrecognized, who in fact was great and legendary.

The reaction came later. His wife Tanya recalls that their home life was already suffering. He was immersed in his own world, in his thoughts, and he was often withdrawn and taciturn. With him – so unpretentious in his food and clothes – domestic life wasn't easy: he demanded constant attention, because he was genuinely focused only on himself. He read everything he could get his hands on, mainly contenting himself with light stuff – newspapers and glossy magazines, the flow of information that catches the eye but doesn't detain you, draining away without

any consequences for the soul. But if he happened on them, he would also read history books, literary fiction and thrillers. He never owned any chess books himself, but after his wife moved to Petersburg he read her chess books with interest.

In his later years he got a computer and played endless blitz games all night long, usually under the handle SmartChip. Visitors to the Internet Chess Club can confirm that late in the evening, before they turned off their computers, they saw SmartChip online, and if they turned on their computers in the morning, they noticed that Chip was still playing. Although here, too, he often beat well-known grandmasters, and his rating, as a rule, was over 3000, his Internet results weren't as good as his normal blitz results. It wasn't surprising: he first used a computer when he was already getting on for 60, and instead of the usual button on the clock his finger had to press a strange thing called a mouse.

In the last few years he gave lessons at Khalifman's chess school on St.Petersburg's Fontanka Canal. In person and via the Internet. When pupils arrived from abroad, he used an interpreter, as Chip understandably didn't know any foreign languages. These lessons were distinctive – he almost always demonstrated his own won games and combinations. A stream of ideas flowed out of him, but he didn't insist on their strict execution – if those ideas don't suit you, I have plenty more, he would have said.

Of course, Chepukaitis couldn't explain the subtleties of modern opening set-ups, but he infected his listeners with his enthusiasm and love for the game, showing them completely different aspects of chess that they hadn't seen before. He impressed on each of them one of the fundamental postulates of his theory: 'everyone makes mistakes, grandmasters and world champions, and there is no particular trick to this game. As you gradually acquire experience, knowledge and skill, you'll be surprised to find that you have talent. Everyone has talent, the question is only how to extract it and demonstrate it.'

He had admirers who saw something in his games that distinguished them from the many thousands of games played every day in tournaments and on the Internet. The Mexican master

Raul Ocampo Vargas wrote an article after his death titled 'Peculiar chess', and Gerard Welling from Holland even put together a small book with a selection of his games. 'I'm not sure if I have increased my mastery of the game, but I'm already more confident,' was the first comment of a grateful pupil, which he received from far-off Argentina.

Chepukaitis's split with his wife in November 2003 hit him hard; they had been together for almost thirteen years. After the divorce and her departure overseas, he was back on his own in his small, neglected one-room flat. This dwelling was more like a bivouac, which he used only for sleeping, and once a week his ex-wife's sisters would stop by to do housework for the single man: some laundry, and they would fill up the empty fridge as he didn't buy anything for himself. He needed little, and even out of that little he only needed the tiniest portion. He was flagging somehow, he had completely stopped paying attention to his appearance, spending almost every night in fierce card battles.

In cards, of course, there have always been dirty players, but in recent years they had become even more ruthless: starting from the first day a large amount of interest accumulated on unpaid debts and you could never know what might happen if the debt wasn't paid for a long period. For them he was a 'soft touch', a 'client', and they cheated him more than once. But even when he understood who was sitting opposite him at the card table, he still continued playing, believing that in spite of all their tricks and devices, his quick calculations and sharp wits would lead him to a happy outcome of the intellectual struggle. Alas, these were only illusions, and sometimes his opponents at cards, considering him a simpleton, practically laughed in his face.

A few years ago at his wife's insistence he went to hospital and he was diagnosed as being at risk of a heart attack, and prescribed peace and rest. It goes without saying that he totally disregarded this advice.

Right up to the end he continued playing various card games, and in his last years he put his meagre pension into slot machines

almost on the day he received it. His earnings from lessons and blitz tournaments were also swallowed up that way. Games were everything to him, and for those who have never been susceptible to this passion, or, if you like, delusion or disease, it is difficult to understand such a person. He played blitz every day. Of course, he started to tire more quickly in his old age, his reactions got slower, but he never even dreamt of giving up chess. Until his very last days he visited the chess club in Petrogradsky District, where he regularly played in blitz tournaments with entry fees, often winning them. His standard odds in a game with a master were three minutes against five. This was for players with a rating of around 2400. With candidate masters it was two minutes. He also continued playing in regular tournaments. The recent innovation of a faster time control with an increment after each move appealed to him: as before he played very fast, and his opponent might find himself nervously looking at the clock, on the verge of time-trouble, while Chepukaitis didn't have much less time than he'd had at the beginning of the game. But he did not like computers, calling them 'slow-witted personalities', believing that with the arrival of computers in the game, bluff and risk had disappeared, and everyone had started playing the way they were advised to by the machine.

After he had passed 60 he had a second wind and was successful in several tournaments, in one of them coming very close to the grandmaster title. In 2000 he took part in the city championship, playing against young but experienced professionals. Although he was the oldest player in the tournament, and the only one who didn't have an international title, Chepukaitis achieved a respectable result in the event, finishing on 50 percent. He was 65 years old, an honourable pensionable age, but looking at him, you'd think there was a mistake in the calendar judging by his spirit: up until he died, no one took him for an old man at all. The generations passed, he played with people who were born at the very beginning of the last century and with those who came into the world in the eighties, who were the same age as his grandson. His lifestyle didn't change at all – what he had done at

20 he was still doing half a century later, and his old age wasn't that different from his youth.

Till the end he retained his boyish perception of life. In Leningrad and Petersburg he was more an idea, a symbol, and although he entrusted his thoughts about chess and some of his games to the pages of his book and his lectures on the website, he remains in our memory more as a phenomenon or a spirit. Like a myth that appeared in chess in the second half of the 20th century and flew away at the beginning of the following one.

He died of a heart attack in the night of the fifth to the sixth of September 2004 in Palanga, Lithuania, where he was playing in the last tournament of his life. The last time I saw him was two months before his death in Petersburg. Chip was playing on the stage of the Chigorin Club in exactly the same place where I had played him in the city championship almost forty years earlier. It was the only game I lost in that tournament. He noticed me and we went out to the foyer. Chip had put on a lot of weight, he was heavy, the 'pepper' in his hair had almost completely given way to the 'salt', and his receding hairline had climbed further back, but still he looked younger than his years. Pleased that one of his fans in Holland was dreaming of taking lessons from him, he began looking for a pen, then a scrap of paper, to write down the address. Striking a light, he smoked a cigarette.

'Listen, I've written a new poem, do you want to hear it?' he asked, and without waiting for a reply, he began declaiming the rhyming lines of his latest production.

'Your move, Chip,' someone said, passing by. Not even turning around, he continued reading enthusiastically as the minutes on his clock ticked away. After all he had so many minutes left on his clock that he could have completed at least a dozen games before his flag would fall.



## Yakov Neishtadt at 80

Yakov Isayevich Neishtadt was born and raised in Moscow. He already knew how to play chess when his father took him to the first round of the Second International Tournament in 1935. A year later, in the foyer of the Art Cinema on Arbat Square, he met a tall, slim teenager. Yasha Neishtadt was thirteen and had a fourth category rating, while Yury Averbakh was fourteen and already third category. They were both from that old Moscow of the twenties and thirties, which we can now only read about in memoirs. Neishtadt was a cousin of the writer Viktor Arlov, in whose Moscow home Anna Akhmatova always stayed when she visited from Leningrad. Other guests included Boris Pasternak, Dimitry Shostakovich, Mikhail Zoshchenko and a very young Josef Brodsky.

Neishtadt was in the same class as his friend and contemporary Yasha Estrin, and in 1938 they played each other in a match for the school championship. Although the two friends' chess strength was about the same, Neishtadt managed to beat his namesake by a wide margin. Thirty-five years later Neishtadt gave Estrin a huge chocolate medal, specially ordered for his 50th birthday, with a writing on it in chocolate: 'FOR MODESTY'. Yakov Borisovich Estrin was by then a very well-known person in the Russian chess movement. To list all his titles in over-the-board and correspondence chess, his arbiter's titles and awards, not to mention his books published in various languages, which he often spoke about with pleasure, would take up more than a page.

In the spring of 1941 Yasha Neishtadt reached the first category, and on June 17 his school graduation ceremony took place, with the awarding of diplomas and a walk around Moscow at night. His youth ended exactly five days later, when the war started. Not quite eighteen, Yakov Neishtadt became a cadet at the infantry academy, and six months later the young lieutenant was the commander of a platoon at the front. What this meant in 1942 is not easy to explain now, but a week later the young lieu-

tenant got promoted when the commander of his company was killed.

Kharkov, Krivoy Rog and Kirovograd are the names of towns and cities that for Neishtadt and millions of young men of his generation, who had put on uniforms straight after school, signified retreat and attempts to escape from encirclement, crossing rivers in ice-cold water up to your neck, and sleepless nights. And death, death standing right beside you at every hour, death choosing the one who, just a minute ago, had stood upright in the trench and, under crossfire, jumped after you into a crater made by artillery shells. Death finding him and passing you by for now. This was one of Neishtadt's own numerous episodes at the front. He was wounded twice, the second time in spring 1944 during an attempt by his division to force a crossing of the Prut River.

For several months Neishtadt commanded a penal company. The full list of soldiers in this company, which had to be relieved more than once, was with a sergeant-major who crossed out most of the names with a pencil after each battle. It was not surprising that after the war he never went out on Victory Day with his comrades-in-arms, as there was no one left for him to greet.

A quarter of a century later Viktor Baturinsky, the director of the Moscow Central Chess Club, stopped in at the office of the magazine *Chess* in the USSR, where Neishtadt was working at the time, and reprimanded him: 'The young people here dress slovenly, it's too bad... And you, Yakov Isayevich, you were at the front, you were in the army, so why do you have your hands in your pockets?' Neishtadt calmly heard out the rant and then replied coldly, 'Where I served, it didn't matter where you put your hands.'

Sometime in the mid-sixties, as a tourist in Vienna, Neishtadt got chatting to a Slovak woman who had married a German. 'Oh, you are so good looking,' she told Neishtadt, 'My husband is your age, but he looks more like your father. True, he did go

through the whole war.’ ‘Me too,’ said Neishtadt. ‘Well, my husband was right in the thick of it in 1943.’ ‘Where?’, Neishtadt asked. It turned out that both time and place were the same.

At the end of 1968 Neishtadt received an invitation from East Germany, where one of his books was to be published. He got his travel documents together and went to the visa office. ‘Do you realise that the world political situation has become very complicated since the events in Prague?’, they asked him. ‘No, we can’t give you permission, we only make an exception for those with relatives abroad. That is unless we’ve fought together, if we’ve been in the same trenches...’, the visa official started explaining. ‘In the trenches?’, asked Neishtadt. ‘I was there, but unfortunately the distance between our trenches was at least one hundred metres.’

Neishtadt remained a lieutenant until the end of the war. He received one more star recently by a decree of President Putin, but he will never rise to the rank of his son, a doctor in Beer-Sheva and a captain in the reserves of the Israeli army.

I am writing about all this in such detail because the war years have not only left a mark on Neishtadt’s entire life, but also, in many ways, formed his character. Along with the wounds and the tuberculosis he brought home with him, the war had also taught him the ‘trench truth’, which only those who had fought at the front knew, and for the rest of his life he could determine precisely who was who and what things were worth.

When Neishtadt returned to Moscow after the war, he enrolled in the Institute of Law and started playing in tournaments again. He had always loved chess and took it very seriously, but he hadn’t had any notable successes at the board, although he was a master. The practical, competitive side of chess didn’t satisfy his analytical abilities and understanding of the game. So he started to play by correspondence, achieving considerable success in this form of chess, in which neither the time spent thinking over variations nor nervousness influence the creative process. He won a prize in the European Championship and played well in the finals of the World Championship.

Neishtadt's analytical and didactic abilities and his logical disposition helped him a great deal in writing opening books, and although today, decades later, his evaluation of some variations has been corrected here and there, and his analyses have been continued and expanded, his *Catalan Opening*, *Queen's Gambit Declined* and *Queen's Gambit Accepted*, especially their way of exposition and explanation of ideas, haven't lost their significance. In addition to books on chess theory he also wrote textbooks and books on chess history. They total more than twenty titles, which have been published in a dozen languages.

When Neishtadt graduated from the Institute of Law in 1951 he didn't get a job immediately. Opening up his passport and seeing that he was Jewish, the head of the employment department gave it back, shaking his head. His friends advised him: 'Put on your lieutenant's uniform, pin up all your medals and go to the Ministry, see what they say to you.' Finally he made up his mind and followed their suggestion. 'Why do you all want to stay in Moscow?', a bureaucrat asked the native Muscovite, entirely in the spirit of that time. 'Why don't you go to the provinces, there are plenty of jobs there.'

With the death of Stalin in 1953 changes began, although at that time no one could have predicted that they would go so far that precisely half a century later Israeli resident Yakov Neishtadt, when he returned to his native country for a brief visit, would be wandering the alleys of his Moscow childhood with his 23-year-old granddaughter, a student at Tel Aviv University, who had already served in the army and spoke not only Hebrew and Arabic, but also English and German. Not forgetting the language in which she had pronounced her first words.

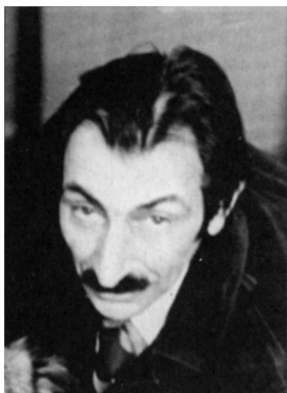
The years of Neishtadt's work as an editor of the magazine *Chess in the USSR* and then as chief editor of '64' were special. His chess work was relatively neutral considering the regularly fluctuating colours of an unfree state. But the main thing was that this had been his favourite work since childhood, and as Neishtadt tells us many years later, 'I thank fate for making this choice for me.'



Yakov Neishtadt (right)  
with Mikhail Tal at the  
office of '64'.



A living  
treasure-trove of  
history,  
Neishtadt knew  
all the chess  
greats personally.  
Here he enjoys a  
relaxed moment  
with Mikhail Tal  
(right) and  
Tigran Petrosian  
(foreground).



Neishtadt as all the chess world knew him (above) and as a nineteen-year-old lieutenant in World War II (right).



The author in his 'former life' with Neishtadt at the Central Chess Club, Moscow 1968.

Neishtadt looked very imposing at that time: combed back, jet-black hair, a black moustache, a lean face with high cheekbones, on which a nose that made him resemble Gogol took pride of place. Lots of people joked about his moustache and nose, the man himself above all. One day Neishtadt tried to persuade Tal to annotate a game for the next issue when the latter walked into the office. As always, the entire editorial team listened to the duel between the two wits. Finally, Tal promised to send his notes in the next few days. Knowing very well what this meant, Neishtadt didn't give up: 'But why don't you dictate them now, Misha, we'll write them down here and apply for your fee right away.' 'OK,' Tal resigned at last. 'I'll tell you them here, if we can just do a few tours around the Gogol monument.'

In 1992 Neishtadt and his family moved to Israel and settled in Beer-Sheva. They have two cats: Froся, born in Moscow, and registered at the local clinic as Fruma, and Dusya (Dora), picked up from the street in Beer-Sheva and completely Russified in the Neishtadt home. During Neishtadt's recent trip to Moscow Froся was seriously ill, so he had to take her to the vet, but fortunately she recovered.

Also in Moscow Yakov Isayevich would go out at night looking in the vacant lot near his home on Tishinskaya Square, a place where stray cats and dogs would live, and treat the animals who awaited him to home-made delicacies. Dressed accordingly, he became a familiar face to the tramps who lived nearby. 'Hey, old man, where do you work, you keeping watch here or something?' one of them asked the slim man of indeterminate age. 'No,' said Neishtadt, looking down, 'I'm a journalist.' 'Fine, old man,' the tramp said indignantly to the editor of *Chess in the USSR*. 'You wouldn't wear rags if you were keeping watch, so say you're a journalist, a journalist.' Imagine the surprise of this acquaintance of Neishtadt's when on a frosty Moscow day he saw him dressed in a dark brown sheepskin coat and a deerskin hat with a briefcase in his hand, coming out of Kropotkinskaya metro station and heading for the Arbat in an unhurried manner.

Neishtadt's night walks didn't remain a secret from chess players. 'Look,' one of them whispered to a friend at a tournament, 'just don't turn around right away, there in the hall is the one I told you about,' and he rotated his finger against the side of his head, 'who feeds all kinds of creatures at night.'

You don't complain about the cold in Beer-Sheva. But after midnight, when the heat subsides, you may see leaving his house for the empty, sleeping streets, an older man dressed very modestly, with a black moustache only slightly tinged with grey. The stray cats are already waiting for him and they know that packed in their nightly guest's bag are delicacies prepared according to a special recipe, which even domestic cats would not refuse. Of course, he can recognize each inhabitant of the cats' kingdom, and they can tell him from a distance. One time Neishtadt was stopped and searched and someone was called to verify his identity, but then they let him go in peace.

And here he has found a friend recently: an older Georgian Jew who was hurrying to deliver something while working the night shift. 'Listen, my dear,' he said to Yakov Isayevich, holding a bag of empty bottles in his hands, 'return these, you can use the refund, I'm begging you from the bottom of my heart.'

Neishtadt's day in Israel starts late. He gets up at around eleven. He listens to the latest news on the radio. In Russian, obviously. The same with television, he prefers news, political discussions and football. Local and Moscow programmes. When he came to Israel he was almost seventy – not the best age to learn a new language that isn't very easy. After a couple of Hebrew lessons he decided he wasn't destined to learn it, and besides, he had some urgent work to do for a Swiss publishing company, and the language that had imbued his genes thousands of years ago remained dormant. His Russian is still the same: rich, vivid and Muscovite. And most of Neishtadt's friends are from Moscow and St.Petersburg.

Every day he sits at his desk and works, often until late at night. He writes and analyses, and he does this with great dedication and accuracy. His name on the cover of a book promises the



reader not only an encounter with a scrupulous text, sprinkled with humour here and there, but also the results of painstaking, thoroughly checked analysis. In the first volume of Kasparov's new book Neishtadt's name is mentioned 25 times, and how many times is it alluded to!

I don't remember when I first met Neishtadt, but probably it was in the early sixties in Leningrad. Whenever I came to Moscow we would see each other, and I visited Neishtadt's home on Pushkinskaya and then on Tishinskaya. The last time was before my emigration from the Soviet Union in August 1972, the second of August to be precise, when I came to Moscow for a few hours to get a visa and we said goodbye, as you have to in those circumstances, forever. I remember well our walk along the boulevards, the ash clouding the city – that year there was a forest fire near Moscow – and our farewell lunch at the Neishtadts'. The silver spoon they gave me for luck has done its job so well that I cherish it to this day. Subsequently, in the early seventies when I won the Championship of Holland for the first time, Neishtadt joked with a pun: Sosonko has seized the 'Golandia' Heights.

For a reader who has never known Neishtadt, his impression might be one of an incredibly convivial fellow, an eccentric jokester with a carefree and light-hearted personality. This wouldn't be entirely true. This is because his analytical work, his writing, his books, his creative process are and have always been the main purpose of his life. This dedication always demands a serious attitude towards work, concentration and the ability not to waste one's energies on trivialities. And also because in his daily encounters with people he often expresses his opinion without caring whether the listener will appreciate it or not. Not everyone can deal with this, and Neishtadt has broken off contact with a considerable number of people temporarily or permanently. He can get offended, he can offend, he can fly into a rage, he shouts now and then if someone else's point of view seems unsuitable or incorrect to him.

Neishtadt is a living treasure-trove of history, anecdotes, incidents, events, memories of people, sketches. I am for no small

part indebted to his memory reserve for my tales of the Club on Gogolevsky Boulevard (see *New In Chess* 2002/2) and many other subjects. His friends, acquaintances and relatives are trying to persuade him to write his memoirs. Neishtadt's 17-year-old grandson, who often visits his grandparents, on hearing his war stories sighed: 'Grandpa, listen, why don't you write all this down, it's so interesting.' And indeed – why not?

The trajectory of Neishtadt's life runs through several eras. Through his Moscow childhood, the war with his lieutenant's uniform riddled with shrapnel in 1942, a year that would remain with him forever, the sinister time at the end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties, his subsequent decades of chess, full of meetings with famous people and the books that he wrote, to the Beer-Sheva life, full of creativity, the years that have brought him to an age that not all of us attain.

You couldn't think of a more fitting description than the final lines of the classic tale 'The Nose' by Gogol, the author from whom Neishtadt borrowed his striking profile: 'But all the same, when you think about it, there really is something in all this. Whatever anyone says, such things happen in this world; rarely, but they do.' During Neishtadt's recent visit to Moscow, his friends and colleagues were astounded by his smart, youthful appearance, his composure, and the way he had kept his sense of humour. Not all of us age as we grow older.

In honour of Neishtadt's birthday Ripol Classic is publishing his new book on Steinitz. I know that his first book about the first world champion, which came out a quarter of a century ago, has been absorbed by many generations of chess players. A few years before his death Wilhelm Steinitz said: 'I am not a chess historian, I myself am a piece of chess history, which no one can ignore.' On the new book I shall say briefly: nobody who is interested in the foundation upon which our game rests can ignore Neishtadt's book on Steinitz.

This year another of Neishtadt's books came out: *Opening Mistakes and Instructive Combinations*. This is actually a textbook composed entirely of very short games with detailed notes and a critique of

mistakes in the opening, examined from the present-day point of view. Along with the classics in this book there are also quite a few games that are unknown (at least to me). There is, for instance, an analysis of his own highly instructive win over Aivars Gipslis in a Bishop's Game, from a tournament in Riga, 1955.

At the very end of the book the author writes: 'Analysing the mistakes of the great masters raises the curtain on many of the mysteries of this game, helping you to discover and exploit your opponent's blunders more easily, and also to 'withstand the blow', to cope with your own mistakes,' finishing with the encouraging: 'It happens to everyone.'

Yakov Isayevich Neishtadt has turned 80. It doesn't happen to everyone. It doesn't happen to just anyone. Dear Yakov Isayevich! I wish you health and many more creative years!

# The Morpheus Variation

All the chess players of the past and present seem to agree that good sleep – ‘a fresh head’ – is a guarantee of success. ‘Interrupted sleep is the first sign of nervous exhaustion,’ says Boris Spassky. ‘I realised that I was losing my match with Fischer in 1972 when I began losing sleep. I woke up at about six in the morning, tossed and turned, and couldn’t get back to sleep for a long time. The ability to preserve your energy and consume it efficiently is a great art. The nerves ensure the strength and stamina that are vital to the chess player, and nervous exhaustion is the chess player’s worst enemy.’

The St.Petersburg tournament of 1914 coincided with a degree project for future grandmaster Grigory Levenfish. He decided to combine both tasks, sharply reducing his hours of sleep. ‘The quality of your play declines and your nervous system is intolerably worn out,’ Levenfish warned young chess players when he was much older. ‘No one cares that you came to the game exhausted and lost because of it.’

‘Sleep is extremely important to a chess player,’ Mikhail Botvinnik said. ‘When I was young I slept wonderfully, but during the third Moscow international tournament of 1936 it was so hot and the streets were so noisy all the time that I lost sleep. But I was 25 and I could play well despite the lack of sleep, I forced myself to play.’

When I talked with Botvinnik in Tilburg in 1993, the Patriarch was already over eighty. He said that in recent years he’d been having more and more trouble getting enough sleep. ‘So what do I do? I lie down peacefully and analyse something for hours. What? Anything that comes into my head, for example the French. The other day I was thinking that if on move three you develop the knight to e7, then later – depending on the circumstances...’

At San Lorenzo in 1993 Timman lost to Short as White in the Exchange Variation of the Ruy Lopez. ‘This was the decisive

game in the World Championship semi-final match,' Jan recalls, 'and I had been up almost the entire night before the game. I remember the heavy feeling I had as I came out to play. From experience I knew that everything, intuition above all, hinged on this. Your mind isn't your own, you're a different person. About ten years later at Wijk aan Zee I lost a won game to Radjabov. That had such an effect on me that I couldn't sleep for the rest of the tournament.'

Quite a few strong grandmasters played in the Moscow blitz championship in 2003. Alexey Dreev won, three-and-a-half points ahead of the runner-up. 'I slept fantastically before the tournament and my head worked perfectly', was the victor's explanation for his success.

You can't be fully rested if your sleep is interrupted, but for the chess player there is an even more frightening foe: insomnia. Long ago Hippocrates pointed out that constant insomnia was a sign of encroaching delirium and described it as a very bad omen. If, bearing this in mind, we think of chess players with psychological problems such as Miles or Vitolinsh, who sometimes didn't sleep for days, we can only imagine how incredibly difficult it must have been for them to play chess. You can resort to sleeping pills, of course, but you often pay for this with a heavy head in the morning, and the cure can be worse than the disease.

'I tried taking pills several times, but there is something unnatural in this, it's already a defeat in some sense. To ease the tension when it reached its peak I thought about trying hash, but I never did resort to that,' says Jan Timman. As a defence mechanism against tiredness the mind demands immediate sleep. Kortchnoi recalls that when Spassky was young he would suddenly say when they were analysing together: 'Excuse me, I have to go out for a little while,' so that after a short nap he could come back refreshed. Or he would just curl up on the sofa in the same room.

Sleep before a game is a topic of its own. Here every chess player has his own habits and preferences. Botvinnik would lie

down before a game, 'but I didn't sleep, I just lay down, because when you're lying down no one sneaks in with stupid talk.' Viktor Kortchnoi is a big fan of sleeping before a game. 'If you can't sleep, it's useful even to just lie down for a while with your eyes closed,' he says. In the late sixties and early seventies, when I was assisting Kortchnoi, one of my duties was to make the telephone call that signalled the end of the maestro's afternoon nap. 'Viktor, it's time,' I'd say with the intonation: arise, sire, important business awaits you, as the servant of the Count of Saint Simon used to wake the French philosopher every morning.

Gata Kamsky always slept before a game. At one of the Dos Hermanas tournaments his father gave a passionate speech in defence of sleeping before the game, using as a justification Veselin Topalov, who included this procedure in his daily schedule. Loek van Wely has also picked up this habit recently, but most chess players of the younger generation are night owls. They sit up late at the chess board (and, of course, at their computers), until three or four in the morning, and they wake up around noon, which gives them just enough time for a snack and perhaps a short stroll before the game.

Morpheus, the god of dreams, was in ancient art portrayed as an old man with wings. People flew on his wings to the nocturnal world of dreams and reveries. Surprising events were intertwined in an unusual way there, that would be impossible in our boring real world, and often we would meet people who were long dead. The past and the future cease to exist, cities spring up undesigned by any architect, and we find ourselves there without the necessity of a journey. People playing chess were transported on the wings of Morpheus to the game world of wooden pieces.

Although the interpretation of dreams occupies a significant portion of Freud's works (from which I understand that a journey symbolises death, while worms, puppies and flies symbolise children and a watering can, a gun, a banana, a carrot, a baton and many more objects symbolise you know what), I haven't

found any chess in there. It is mentioned, true, that the king and queen symbolise parents, but this has nothing to do with chess.

On the shelves of bookshops in Russia there is now a multitude of different volumes about the interpretation of dreams. In these books you can find the 'chess' theme and almost all reference books on dreams agree that losing a game is a bad sign. One guide warns that a defeat can lead to stagnation in your affairs and worsening health, another says that your enemies are scheming against you, while winning a game means that you will overcome all difficulties and be successful. The conclusion is clear: even in your sleep you must strive for victory.

A dream in which you achieve excellent results at chess signifies a future promotion at work. However, if you lose a game to a much stronger opponent in your night-time wanderings, you should reconsider your choice of profession. If you are playing White, you will receive a tempting proposal that could make you a nice profit, while the black pieces generally symbolise damage and loss. So the colour of the pieces is important in your sleep, too.

If you dream about developing a strong attack on your opponent and you have the pleasure of watching him agonise over which move to make in time-trouble, it doesn't mean at all that you are a naturally cruel person. This is the place to mention the old saying of Plato, that a good person is one who enjoys in his dreams what bad people do in real life.

Efim Geller was a tireless analyst. For him, in his own words, chess was an antidote to all of life's misfortunes: 'If I'm agitated or bothered by something, I sit down at the chess board for five or six hours and gradually I become myself again.' It's not surprising that he often dreamed about chess. 'Sometimes he whispered chess moves in his sleep,' his widow recalled, 'or he would wake up in the night and go to his desk to write down a variation that had come into his head.' This phenomenon is not so uncommon. According to the memoirs of his wife, Vladimir Lenin, a keen chess player, would shout out in his sleep after several games in the evening: 'If he goes there with his knight, I'll go here with my bishop.'

In the years when Vasily Smyslov was regularly playing in tournaments, he slept without interruption and without any dreams, but recently he has been dreaming about chess, and most frequently about confused positions with fantastically arranged pieces. He also dreams about people. Most of them are no longer among the living. He has talked to Levenfish several times and once he dreamed about Emanuel Lasker, with whom Smyslov played an extremely close game, the result of which the former world champion has forgotten.

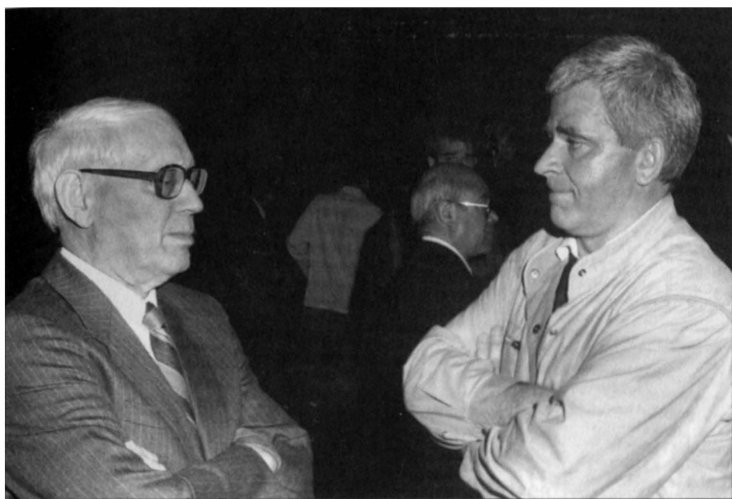
Now and again Boris Spassky has dreams about chess: 'I'll mention two of the clearest. In one I'm playing Averbakh and I don't notice his rook move from a1 to c1. It was such a huge rook in my dream. In the other dream I was talking with Alekhine all night and this conversation made such a strong impression on me that it's a shame I didn't write it down the next day. I've forgotten now what the conversation was about. I only remember that at the time I really liked Alexander Alexandrovich.'

Semyon Furman once dreamed about a beautiful mating combination he hadn't found at the board in a game with Ratmir Kholmov that they had played in the Soviet Championship in Leningrad in 1963, that had ended in a draw. 'All night long the feeling of an unfulfilled duty did not leave me', Furman recalled the following day. 'I dropped off only towards morning, and in my sleep I did indeed find a variation with which I could have mated Kholmov'.

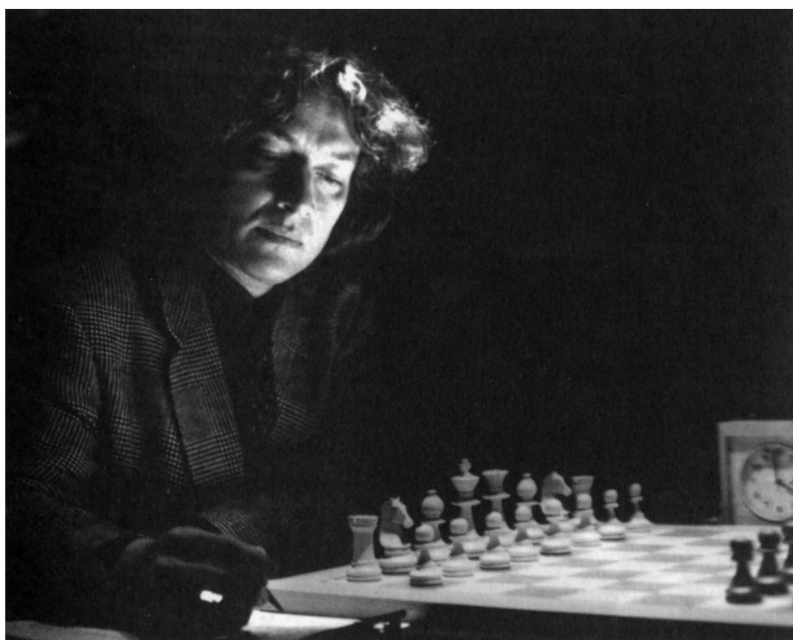
Vladimir Bagirov, one of the greatest experts in the Alekhine Defence, sometimes told with a smile how he began playing this opening after Alekhine had personally appeared to him in a dream and given his blessing to the study of it. The Alekhine Defence has served Bagirov faithfully and truly throughout his career and the memorial on his tombstone in Riga is in the form of a marble chess board with a black knight coming out on the first move, as a symbol of the opening.

Iosif Dorfman recalls how during the Fischer-Larsen match in 1970 he dreamed about a beautiful refutation of a combination





Mikhail Botvinnik with Boris Spassky. While sleeping perfectly well in his youth, the Patriarch would lie awake thinking about chess at advanced age.



Often dreaming about chess, Jan Timman sometimes found solutions to complicated positions in his sleep.



At the start of the Sosonko-Timman game, Tilburg 1983. Timman lost, but that night a beautiful stalemate combination came to him in a dream.



Tigran Petrosian pulling a tasty piece of meat from a shashlik skewer. Hans Ree used to have unpleasant dreams about the voraciousness of the Armenian Tiger.

the future world champion had played in the fourth game. When he woke up he saw that the variations imprinted in his mind unfortunately didn't match reality. But quite recently Dorfman also saw in a dream a completely unexpected good move in the main variation of the Slav Defence. The Morpheus Variation is still awaiting its moment, and without doubt, in the notes to it something will be said about its origins.

Yury Razuvaev recalls that when he and Furman were assisting Karpov in the 1970s, the 12th world champion surprised them with amazing ideas that had come into his head in a dream, which he demonstrated the next day on the board.

Grandmaster Leonid Shamkovich turned 80 last year. He doesn't play chess any more, but he regularly dreams about chess. Although the American grandmaster has a rather broad opening repertoire, his dreams are surprisingly monotonous. He always plays the same variation as White: 1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 c6. He seizes the initiative, attacks, but his opponent counter-attacks and the win always slips away from him. In the morning Shamkovich tries to reconstruct the game, but he hasn't succeeded yet. His memory only preserves the contours of the position.

Hans Ree sometimes has unusual dreams. To understand the two that follow, it should be pointed out that in the sixties Ree often met Hein Donner, and they played lots of games. One night Ree dreamed that they were playing a match and he achieved winning positions time after time. In one of the games, Ree was on the verge of victory, but while he was considering how to strike the decisive blow, Donner swung his arm and swept all the pieces off the board, after which the arbiter immediately assigned a loss to Ree and the players peacefully began analysing. 'Hey, listen,' said Donner, 'what happened, you went completely mad, you could have easily won, why didn't you make this move here?' 'I was about to go there,' Ree replied, 'but at that point you ...' 'Remember,' Donner interrupted, 'in chess, as soon as you have a chance, you must immediately seize it.'

In Ree's other dream he was playing Donner at the Wijk aan Zee tournament and the game was adjourned in a position that was clearly better for him. But for some reason Donner insisted that the game had to be played in a huge hall in which enormous loudspeakers were blasting out music, young people were playing all kinds of games, shouting and screaming, using expressions that are popular with this generation all over the world, while thousands of visitors were looking at the British royal family's jewels. 'Unsporting, grandmaster!', Ree shouted in despair, but he couldn't remember if this helped him. 'Unsporting, grandmaster!' was the title of an article by Petrosian in Komsomolskaya Pravda in 1975, in which the author attacked Kortchnoi.

At the same Wijk aan Zee tournament Ree had another dream: the landscape of the area where he found himself was very rough and the people were similar. Ree was sitting, securely tied to a chair, watching as a group of degenerates with crooked smiles were attacking a piece of raw meat, bashing it. Fountains of blood spurted in all directions, but this wasn't enough for them. 'This will happen to you, too, if you put up a fight,' their leader said, who on closer inspection turned out to be Petrosian. The explanation for this nightmare is probably that Ree had a very poor score against Petrosian, and in one game he had had to resign as early as move eight.

Jan Timman constantly dreams about chess. His dreams are often pleasant and colourful. In one of them he was playing Kasparov and things were going his way like never before. By the adjournment he was winning material and had plenty of winning chances. Timman's seconds started analysing and the next morning they told him that the results of the analysis had been put into the computer. 'When I began looking at the image on the screen I saw a landscape, and for some reason I was in this landscape, going for a lovely walk in the mountains,' Jan recalls. 'Suddenly I saw an eagle's nest somewhere way up in the heavens. Kasparov was in it. The path to this nest was extremely narrow and fantastically curved. The Narrow Path is the title of my

book about struggling for the World Championship, only now this narrow road looked more like an inaccessible path. And I realised that I had to be in perfect form to climb this path.'

In another dream Jan was playing Hort in some kind of team event. In reply to the offer of a draw, Timman said, 'I have to ask my captain.' Receiving a categorical refusal, he went back to the board, held out his hand to his opponent and said, 'It's OK, Vlastimil.' Timman dreams about Donner quite often. Once Donner was playing Hans Ree and Timman was watching. Jan remembered the position very well. 'It was a sharp variation of the Sicilian Defence. Donner plays f4, Ree instantly replies with d5. Donner can close the centre with e5, but he writes down the move f5 and, after making the move, he comes up to me and says just: 'Don't give up!' I understood that most of all he was cheering himself up, this was the last period of his life, when Hein was already disabled.'

In the eighties and nineties Timman regularly played matches with the strongest grandmasters in the world. 'At the end of May 1982,' Timman recalls, 'I was about to play Kortchnoi, and I often worried about the approaching match. Until I dreamed that this match would be even easier than the first match with Hübner. That, again, I wouldn't lose a single game. And that is what happened. But you shouldn't think that I always have optimistic dreams. After my good start in 1988 I played two bad tournaments in a row. 'You haven't drunk to the bottom of the cup,' a voice clearly said to me in a dream, 'you will fail one more time.' And at the tournament in Belfort I shared last place.'

Before the start of his match with Yusupov in Linares in 1992 Timman dreamed that he and his wife were standing at a taxi rank when a car drew up and Artur Yusupov appeared out of nowhere, also with his wife, and they got into that taxi, leaving the Timmans behind. That dream probably left some sort of scar on his soul: the next day Timman lost the first game of the match. The second game was a draw. Timman was White, and in a long, forced variation of Petroff's Defence that was fashionable at the time he failed to get an advantage.

After the game Timman and his second in that match, Jeroen Piket, subjected the whole variation to a thorough analysis, but they couldn't find anything promising. That night at about half past three Jan woke up: he had the solution! The next day Timman demonstrated the find he had discovered in his sleep to Piket, they checked all the variations again and began looking forward to the next game as White. In the fourth game Artur tried a different route, but in the sixth he repeated the moves of the second game. The novelty on move 21 caught him by surprise and Timman won the game.

'I still dream about Tal,' says Timman, 'and it's hardly surprising, as he was such a charismatic person. Once, after Misha had died, I dreamed we were playing in some tournament in Holland. Before the last round I was sharing first to third place. Tal had fallen behind and couldn't win the tournament. In the last round we were playing each other. It was a quiet variation in the Slav. I had a clear advantage and I made a queen move and got up from the board. When I came back I saw that I had been assigned a loss and Tal had already filled in his score sheet. I refused to sign my score sheet or congratulate him. As I was leaving the tournament hall I told Tal that I had completely forgotten what happened at the end of the game, and he replied with a smile, 'After finishing a concert Zhiganov wouldn't remember anything either.'

'Although I'd never heard that name, I guessed that Zhiganov was some kind of musician, and I said that perhaps Zhiganov was deafened by the music or under the influence of drugs. At last we came to a hall, sat down in a corner, and Tal started flicking through a telephone book in some Scandinavian language, maybe Swedish. Then Gufeld showed up and I don't remember anything else after that.'

In a game against Timman at the Interpolis tournament in Tilburg in 1983 I managed to get a better endgame: Black's king was trapped on a square in the corner of the board and his central pawn was very weak. Six moves later Timman resigned.

After analysing the game we agreed that although Black could

have played something better here, White had a big advantage. The next day at breakfast in the hotel Jan told me that there was a marvellous escape for Black that had come to him in a dream. When he woke up he rushed to the chess board so he could see with his eyes open that what he'd dreamt was real.

Introduced by what seemed at first glance to be a suicidal pawn move, he could have sacrificed a knight and then begin an endless chase of the white king with his 'rampant' rook.

Artur Yusupov recalls that in the years when he was playing chess more intensively than he does now, his mind often continued working in his sleep, usually looking for solutions that he hadn't found in the game. It happens now, too – after a difficult simultaneous exhibition a position that he hasn't been able to solve a few hours previously will go round and round in his head. In a game with Kotronias in the Bundesliga, Yusupov had a better bishop ending. At one point Artur thought his opponent hadn't played the best move and had given him a chance. Something even flashed into his head, but there was hardly any time left and in the end the game was drawn. The players didn't find a win in their short joint analysis, either: although White even had an extra pawn, there was too little material left on the board. But Yusupov's intuition hadn't deceived him. There was a win, and Artur found it that night in his sleep!

Lev Alburt also once saw a move in an adjourned position in his sleep, and another time he saw a wonderful opportunity in one of the main variations of the Alekhine Defence. 'From experience I knew that the next morning the idea might completely disappear from my memory, so I woke up in the night, dragged myself out of bed and wrote down what I had dreamed. Although now I can't say if it was really a dream or if it was that relaxed state when you think you're asleep but you're not, when some nook in your mind is still working.' Almost all the people I talked to about their night-time chess visions mentioned this feeling of a 'waking dream'.

From my own chess visions I can only remember one that appeared to me from somewhere of the Leningrad master Evgeny

Kuzminikh, a devout explorer of the Schara-Von Hennig Gambit. During the game he had the habit of taking a slice of lemon wrapped in a handkerchief out of his pocket and, while his opponent was thinking about his move, going off to one side and sucking sensually on it. I also found the master doing this in a dream when I was playing in a tournament in Geneva in 1977. Freud would probably give my dream some other interpretation, but I remember seeing the lemon's acidity and bitterness as a warning, and indeed the next day, playing Larsen, I landed in an unpleasant endgame with major pieces and couldn't save it.

Next I dreamed about an adjourned position in which I adroitly managed to win a vital tempo with an outside pawn move. The move wasn't too complicated and the other me, watching the original me in the same dream, was even surprised that I didn't find such a simple idea sooner. The awakening was upsetting for both of me. The real me quickly found that the saving move was impossible: in reality the pawn was already on the square that it had moved to in the night vision.

The computer doesn't dream. Its iron mind never gets tired and it doesn't need to rest. In the amazing programs of the Quantum Computer of the future all the nuances of the position will be calculated and processors will be designed that can sort through hundreds of millions of moves per second; these processors will penetrate more and more deeply into the mysteries of the game, reaching out to the very end. But until then the human being is still in the game and he can always shelter in his night-time refuge, where a surprising idea he hasn't seen during the game is roaming in the alleys of his mind and may suddenly flash brightly. There, in that refuge, you can talk to Alekhine, play a game with Lasker or Tal, or see your mother who long ago taught you how to play chess.



# If the Trumpet Sounds

Ludek Pachman (1924-2003)

The Islington Open in London was my first international tournament, in December 1972. I took the train from The Hague to Hook of Holland, then the night ferry, with four people to a cabin. In Brighton at 6:30 in the morning there was a puzzled raising of an eyebrow at the sight of my suspicious-looking papers: 'Chess? What do you mean, chess? I'm asking about the purpose of your visit to the United Kingdom.'

Then the train to London, the sticky porridge of the language and a word that suddenly makes sense, that you cling to, trying to swim to the life raft of a firm meaning. In London the whirlpool of the underground with the familiar names on signs: Victoria Station, Covent Garden, Piccadilly Circus, Hyde Park Corner. The attic with the tiny washbowl on the sixth floor of a Bed and Breakfast without a lift.

Some young, ambitious British players played in the tournament: Raymond Keene, Bill Hartston, Michael Stean and Robert Bellin. Bellin surprised everyone by winning with a 100 percent score and taking home a fabulous prize, 1,000 pounds. All the attention, though, was riveted on Ludek Pachman. The sponsor of the tournament made the first move on his board, a charming blonde posed next to him wearing a ribbon that identified her as 'Miss Islington', he was filmed for television and journalists chased after him. The newspapers wrote about the hero of the Prague Spring who had just arrived in the West and only included the dry tournament results in small print underneath.

We got to know each other and talked several times. Anyone who had managed to get out to the West from behind the Iron Curtain saw another as a kindred spirit. His head turned restlessly from side to side as if on a hinge, and he spoke continuously, leaving the person he was talking to time for a short reply only. In our conversations he often used the word 'they', and at that

time, for anyone who had lived in Eastern Europe, it was clear what he meant. I knew, of course, that a few years previously Ludek Pachman himself had belonged in that category – ‘they’.

Three years later we met again, this time at the Mannheim International Tournament. By then he was completely involved in politics and I often saw him in the restaurant or the lobby of the hotel with people who looked nothing like chess players. He easily switched from German to English or Spanish. He spoke Russian very well, but with the characteristic accent of all Czechs.

‘So, how is Donner, still chopping sugarcane in Cuba?’, he asked me a couple of times, and, without waiting for an answer, he threw back his head and laughed.

A few months later, in August 1975, we both played in the zonal in Barcelona. This was an unusual tournament. About ten days before it began in Spain – where Franco was in power at the time – several people were sentenced to death for killing a policeman. When we arrived in the capital of Catalonia we found out that some representatives of Eastern European countries – strong grandmasters from Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia – had refused to come to the tournament in protest, while the Romanian and Hungarian chess players had arrived in Barcelona but eventually decided not to play because they were afraid of being punished by their governments when they returned home.

Of course, Pachman felt like a fish in water. We did not analyse our quick draw in the first round. Reporters from Radio Catalonia were already waiting for Pachman in the foyer of the tournament hall, so that once again he could give his opinion on such an intrusion of politics into sport, and into such a noble sport as chess to boot. Ludek spoke passionately, recalling the names of people from Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union who had been given long prison sentences for writing letters of protest or publishing their work abroad. Listening to his emotional speech, I found it hard to imagine that everything had been different once, when Ludek Pachman wasn’t merely a zealous worshipper of the totalitarian system, against which he now spoke so furiously, but also a significant cog in that machine.

After World War II, the young, energetic communist Ludek Pachman became a member of a commission that doctors in hospitals, professors at universities, engineers and scientists had to pass through by proving their loyalty and knowledge of Marxism-Leninism. Ludek Pachman was a harsh examiner. He pronounced the final verdict, which might tell the university professor that he would do better to look for work as a window cleaner. Hundreds of lecturers and doctors ended up on the streets and had to get new qualifications as boiler men, security guards, waiters and/or ancillary workers. Czech émigrés who had sought asylum in Germany and Austria called him 'Colonel Pachman' and said that he was one of the most sinister figures of the Gottwald regime.

Subsequently Pachman became head of the department for preparing union cadres and stayed in this post for several years. At party courses he gave lectures on dialectics and historical materialism. His favourite subject was 'Imperialism – the highest stage of capitalism'. Stalin's books represented the pinnacle of wisdom for him. 'Everything was so simply and clearly laid out in them', he thought at that time.

When he became a communist, like many young people, Pachman was taken with the ideas of equality and brotherhood. But unlike most young people, he tried to put these ideas into practice, and the ideals of his youth, oriented towards the distant future, were relegated to the background by the hard labour of party discipline and compliance with party directives.

In 1952, an unsavoury year of significant Soviet-style events involving the former leaders of the republic, Pachman left national politics. He gave up his job with the Central Unions, and chess played the leading role in his life for the next fifteen years. In spite of this, in chess circles Pachman was still seen as a person with connections at the very top, in the highest echelons of power. In his presence chess players from Eastern Europe knew to bite their tongues, otherwise they didn't know how their words would be twisted when they got home. Those who remember that time say the conversation would immediately be-

come forced or people would go completely silent when Ludek Pachman joined them.

Pachman's chess style was characterised by a sophisticated set-up in the opening, a wonderful knowledge of theory, pragmatism, belief in himself, and optimism. He won the Czechoslovak Championship on seven occasions, taking the title for the first time in 1946. From the end of the fifties to the mid-sixties Pachman was a very strong grandmaster and a welcome guest at all international tournaments. As well as playing chess he also coached, organised events and wrote books. He wrote more than 80 books about various aspects of the game – strategy, tactics and openings – and they have been translated into many languages.

In those years Pachman went to Cuba very often, to play in tournaments and coach on the Island of Freedom, as they called Cuba in communist countries. There was no doubt about his political sympathies at the time. Viktor Kortchnoi recalls that in 1963 during the Capablanca Memorial Tournament in Havana, Pachman proudly told him and Bob Wade: 'I learnt how to drive a tank recently', and in response to their perplexed looks he explained, 'We have to defend our Cuba!'

Pachman met Fidel Castro a few times. 'Why don't you smoke, Comrade Pachman?', Castro, the big cigar-lover, asked him once. Pachman replied that he had never smoked in his life. So Castro took out a huge cigar, put it in Pachman's hand and said, 'If you are a friend of Cuba, you will smoke this cigar to the end.' Several decades later, Pachman recalled, 'With my innate opportunism I decided to show that I was a friend of Cuba and started smoking the cigar. I got through it, but it was a torture. To get rid of the disgusting taste in my mouth I downed a sizable quantity of Bacardi. From then on I had such a revulsion against smoking that I tried to put every smoker I met on the righteous path.'

Pachman's recollections continued: 'This incident was typical of Castro. It was well-known that he played chess, or rather, he thought he did. He drew with Fischer and Petrosian, who both agreed to a draw on move 5. The only opening that Castro knew



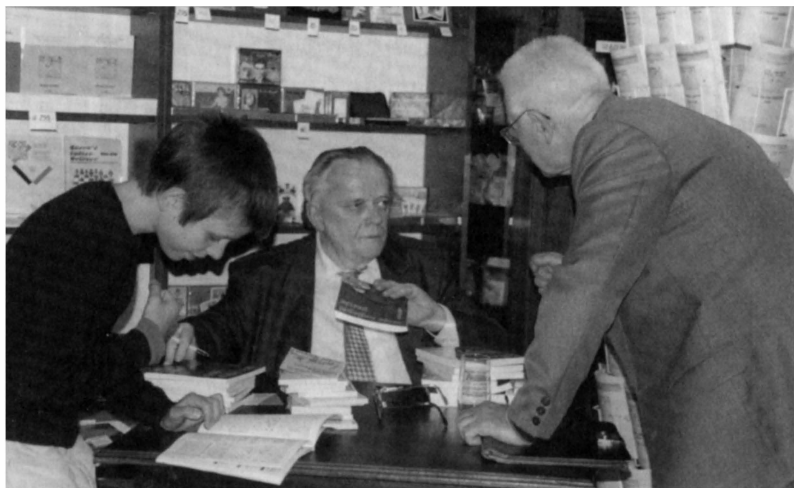
Ludek Pachman with Fidel Castro: 'If you are a friend of Cuba, you will smoke this cigar to the end.'



Demonstration at the entrance of Hotel Kennemerduin in Wijk aan Zee, January 1972. Wondering why Pachman hadn't been invited to the Hoogovens Tournament, activists wanted to know: 'Where is Ludek Pachman?'



'A nice, kind and responsive person, with whom it was interesting to spend time, to talk about anything, to laugh.'  
(Bretislav Modr, editor *Sachinfo*)



Ludek Pachman, a prolific chess writer as well as a strong grandmaster, signing one of his many books in Prague, 1999. To his left, a 14-year-old David Navara, currently the highest-rated Czech grandmaster.

as Black was the 'Fidel Attack' – 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♗d6. But he himself didn't suspect that he was a patzer. In the 'championships of the cabinet of ministers' that were regularly organised at the time, he always came second, as all the others let him win. The winner of the tournaments was always Che Guevara, the only one who wasn't afraid of Castro.'

The Prague Spring completely changed Pachman's views. After the occupation of his country by Warsaw Pact forces, he turned into a passionate, tireless, uncompromising campaigner against the new regime. In total he spent eighteen months in prison, which severely damaged him, as his health wasn't all that strong to begin with. The Lugano Olympiad took place two months after the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia and all the participants in the Czechoslovakia-USSR match came out in black armbands. Pachman wasn't on the national team at that Olympiad; he was too involved in politics and had no time for chess. But he did go to Lugano and almost stirred up a huge political debate at the FIDE Congress. When the Soviet delegate, Rodionov, proposed the immediate exclusion of South Africa from the international chess federation, FIDE president Folke Rogard interrupted the session and called the Soviet delegate in for a conversation. 'I should show you a letter from Pachman,' he said. 'After hearing your proposal to exclude South Africa, he wrote that if anyone should be excluded from FIDE, it is the six Warsaw Pact countries and the Soviet Union above all. If you keep insisting on the exclusion of South Africa, then I will have to let Pachman's statement make the next move, by publicly reading it at the next session, opening a debate, and possibly casting a vote on it.' The issue of South Africa's membership was withdrawn from the agenda of the Lugano congress.

Back in Czechoslovakia, Pachman drew large crowds when he received permission to tour the country giving simultaneous exhibitions and lectures. But people didn't come to his lectures just to hear about the latest chess news and meet a famous grandmaster. A fiery agitator and lecturer, he spoke about what worried

everyone in those dark days in Czechoslovakia and about what should be done to attract the world's attention to the events in their country. He was truly proficient at speaking in public and loved doing it. Fellow dissident Vaclav Havel called him 'a prison camp orator'.

Attending underground meetings, distributing pamphlets that were written at night and hastily duplicated, calling out openly for civil disobedience, organising demonstrations, writing letters of protest and distributing them to all possible organisations and political and social activists – in these months Pachman hardly had time to sleep. It was obvious that this couldn't continue for long – he provoked everyone with his presence, from new party functionaries to Big Brother in Moscow, who was watching the events in Czechoslovakia with Argus' eyes.

In the summer of 1969 Kortchnoi and Keres played in an international tournament in Czechoslovakia. One day Kortchnoi found a note at the hotel from the Estonian grandmaster: 'I've been invited to meet some interesting people, I'll be back this evening.' This was a meeting with Ludek Pachman. At that time he was one of the most odious people in the eyes of the new functionaries, and such a visit could not go unnoticed. The following day, on returning to Moscow, Keres was taken straight from the gangway of the aircraft to the KGB headquarters at the Lubyanka, and subjected to an interrogation for several hours. Whether this happened because the Estonian grandmaster had been informed on by Olympic athlete Emil Zatopek, who had been at the meeting, as Pachman himself later asserted to Kortchnoi, or just because the mutinous grandmaster's flat was constantly being watched, is difficult to say. One thing was clear: anyone who came into contact with Ludek Pachman fell under the surveillance of the authorities and themselves became objects of suspicion.

They arrested Pachman in August 1969. Even in prison he wrote protest letters, to the president of the republic, to Fidel Castro, and to the United Nations. In 1970 they released him, but he was arrested again twice. When he went on a hunger



strike they force-fed him, but here, too, Pachman went his own way: he closed his eyes and didn't open them again until his release. He also stopped speaking, communicating with prison guards and doctors only in writing. When Pachman's wife visited, she spoke to him, but Ludek wrote down his replies on cards. They feared for his mental health, but when a doctor asked him if his behaviour would change after his release, he wrote on a card: 'Of course. When I'm at home, I will open my eyes and I will speak.'

At first Pachman didn't want to think about emigrating, but in November 1972 he left Czechoslovakia nonetheless and moved to West Germany, to Solingen, where his friend Egon Evertz ran one of the strongest chess clubs in the Federal Republic. Several years later Pachman moved to Passau in the southeast of the country, a city that stood at the crossroads of three countries – West Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Pachman added another 'n' to his surname, making it sound more German. In 1978 Ludek Pachmann won the championship of the Federal Republic of Germany.

An émigré often becomes a foreigner on both sides of the border. He becomes a different person for those who stay behind, but isn't fully accepted among his new compatriots either. For Pachman, though, this rule didn't apply: whether he was at home or abroad, the most important thing was his own personality, Ludek Pachman, wherever he lived, in Prague or in Passau.

One year previously, I had played him at a tournament in Geneva. He offered me a draw when we came out of the opening, again, when I had achieved a big advantage, and a third time when the position was completely drawn. I said something in a temper to him after the game. Having cooled down, I understood that I was wrong: if I should have been angry at anyone for not winning the game, it was only at myself.

When, a year later at the Lone Pine tournament, I met Pachman early on a Sunday morning on the main street of this small California town, I held out my hand and, remembering

Geneva, began apologising. He looked at me in bewilderment: what did I mean? He had been in those kinds of situations many times, not only with an acquaintance with whom he'd played a few games and spoken occasionally at tournaments, but also with like-minded people, whom he'd known for many years, colleagues, friends, and his own brother. They'd been through friendship and quarrels, disagreements and reconciliations, hot and cold.

'It was difficult to say when Pachman considered you a friend and when you were an enemy', Lubosh Kavalek recalled later. 'He liked to quarrel and often reversed his opinions about people.' That's why on that day in Lone Pine he replied to my greeting in a friendly manner, not even understanding why I was apologising. Our conversation, by the way, was very brief. 'I'm in a hurry,' Ludek said as he walked, 'let's talk in an hour or so, I'm late for a church service.'

Church? I didn't know then that Ludek Pachman had become a zealous Catholic and had even written a pamphlet about his conversion to the Catholic faith. Of course it made his life easier, as a believer rids himself of questions, and without faith, you won't find the answers. In his case it was even simpler: he had switched from a surrogate religion, Marxism-Leninism, to something else, and I don't think the change was difficult for him.

Pachman wrote that when he went to prison again, he realised that when he was at home he felt he was a believer, but now he wasn't in any condition to pray. Instead, he had long discussions with God and in his head he argued on both sides: 'I told myself that I was very sinful, and promised to change my life for the better, but at present it was impossible, as I could only do this at home.' In his discussions with Pachman God had to keep a sharp ear open, as Pachman was a marvellous polemicist.

Pachman became an active member of the Christian Social Union, siding with the extreme right-wing group of this Bavarian party. The annual congress of the Christian Social Union took place in Passau, in the hall of the Nibelungen, and thousands of residents of the city came on the first day of Catholic Lent to lis-

ten to Franz Josef Strauss, the long-time leader of the party. Pachman became a personal friend of Strauss, whose very name caused people to gnash their teeth in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. On a cruise in 1982 I talked to the wife of the German politician. 'Herr Pachman is very valuable to the party. He is an excellent speaker and debater', Mrs Strauss said. Indeed, in public discussions Ludek was very good. This was particularly noted by members of left-wing parties, who liked to quote from the classics. 'No, Marx put it quite differently from what you said...' Pachman would object. His memory was superb, his opponents were laid flat, and he often defeated them.

Pachman was extraordinarily ambitious and had enormous confidence in himself and his purpose. He was a master of intrigue, he could see the weaknesses of his opponents and exploit them. These are features, of course, of a true politician, and he could have gone far in politics if he had argued less. If he had shown patience and the desire to make compromises, the ability to shut his eyes. But he didn't have these latter qualities. He didn't want to win on points, but with a knockout every time.

Pachman preserved his youthful fervour for his whole life and he never feared a game on his opponents' turf, even if this was dangerous for him. At the beginning of the war the young Pachman composed some problems, dedicated them to his older brother and sent them to a German chess magazine, which published them. Ludek was 16 years old, and his older brother Vladimir was imprisoned in Sachsenhausen concentration camp at the time for his left-wing convictions.

At the European Championships in 1977 Pachman played for West Germany. The championships were being held in Moscow at the height of the Cold War and anyone from the West had to contend with people eavesdropping on them and following them everywhere. In his case direct provocations were also possible. Perhaps some would have refused to go on this trip. Some, but not Ludek Pachman. He looked forward eagerly to meetings with his former compatriots. He came out, of course, for the match

with Czechoslovakia, but he didn't get the chance to play. There had been a categorical instruction from Prague: it was forbidden to play Pachman and an hour after the start of the round the West German team received a point. Pribyl, who was supposed to play Pachman, never came to the chess board.

Pachman never liked to waste time pointlessly, he tried to use it to the full, and passive relaxation was always a torment for him. The absence of work was a synonym for boredom. 'We both played for Solingen in the German Bundesliga', Lubosh Kavalek recalls, 'and one day before the game, having ordered our lunch, we were sitting in a restaurant waiting for the food to come. 'When do you think we'll get served?' Ludek asked a passing waiter. 'In about ten minutes', he replied. 'Fine', said Pachman, putting aside his napkin, 'I can write another letter in that time', and headed for the door.'

A quarter of a century later Pachman was supposed to play a game in the Czech team championship for his club, Vysehrad. But he didn't cancel a previously planned lecture in Germany. He left Prague in the afternoon, arrived in Passau at eight in the evening, and straight after the lecture he returned to the Czech Republic and sat right down at the chess board. He was almost 70 years old then.

With his uncoordinated body – a legacy of childhood polio – Pachman played tennis, spoke several languages, played the piano, played bridge with a passion, was a tireless orator and a prolific writer. And he was, of course, a strong grandmaster. In his best years he was a very strong grandmaster.

Besides his chess writings Pachman has written thousands of pages on political and religious subjects, almost everything that was topical, in newspapers and magazines. In these articles you would not find the slightest trace of doubt anywhere. He always knew better, doubts were alien to him, and if reality contradicted his world view, he disapprovingly turned away from it.

The German title of Pachman's memoirs, which were published immediately after his emigration, was 'Now I can speak'.

'I doubted', Pachman wrote in the introduction, 'whether it was worth my while to write this book until one of my friends said that a person must leave some evidence of the truth. He would have written the word Truth with a capital 'T' because he is a devout Christian. I won't risk using a capital letter, because I know very little about these capitals. But his words force me to say: I am writing my book only about that which I know to be absolutely reliable and accurate. All the rest I have left out of the narrative.'

Despite these emotional words, it isn't that difficult to find mistakes and distortions in Pachman's memoirs, whitewashed facts and overlooked events. The title of this book in Czech is 'It Was So'. It was not so, said certain wits who were acquainted with its content. In English Pachman's memoirs were at first going to be called 'How It Was'. When the book was almost finished, the publisher informed Lubosh Kavalek about this, and suggested that he write about the same era. 'In that case the title of my book will be 'How It Wasn't', Kavalek said, and Pachman's book came out in English with the title *Checkmate in Prague*.

At the end of his memoirs, Pachman writes: 'A revolution always begins with poetry and toasts, and ends by devouring its own children. I no longer want to have anything to do with any revolution. They can devour whomever they want. Nevertheless, I have a worrying feeling that in my old age, if the trumpet sounds, I'll climb on those idiotic barricades again.' This premonition didn't deceive him. When the Velvet Revolution occurred in Czechoslovakia in 1989, he immediately returned to Prague and took part in the events. He was 65 then, a decent pensionable age. For some, but not for Ludek Pachman. When Pachman moved to Prague, they told him: 'Ludek, everyone knows you, your books still have a wonderful reputation, why don't you concentrate only on chess, especially as there are now unlimited possibilities to publish your books.' 'No', Pachman replied, 'chess is only chess, I'm interested in politics, life, life itself.'

Pachman was still full of energy and plunged entirely into politics, believing that Czechoslovakia would now, finally, set itself on the right course, with Christianity and the other institutions he had become used to in Germany becoming the driving force in a strong state. But religion above all. It goes without saying that Pachman himself would play a leading role in the creation of this new Czechoslovakia. But he had left the country two decades previously and no one needed his ideas any more. It wasn't even because of his communist affiliations; it was just that his time had passed. There was no place for Ludek Pachman in the new Czechoslovakia.

Pachman became the chief advisor to the leader of the Christian party, but it lost the elections, and this was a huge personal defeat for him, one of the biggest disappointments of his life. He began living in two houses, one in the Czech Republic and one in Germany, as émigrés from Eastern Europe sometimes did, some with pleasure, some with trepidation, feeling uncomfortable in both places, like a general who misses his white horse when he sits on a black one and vice versa. At first Pachman commuted regularly between Passau and Prague, sometimes not even noticing where he was at any given moment. 'It's a tragedy', Pachman said, 'if I'm in Germany and sign my name Pachman, and in the Czech Republic I sign as Pachmann, and I can't get money out of the bank here nor there.'

Pachman worked on the issue of the Sudeten Germans, who had been forced to flee Czechoslovakia en masse after the Second World War. Of course, this problem didn't suddenly arise in 1945, and, like many of the tragic problems of the last century, it was not black and white. Those who in the past have written about it in these terms have been doomed to failure, but Ludek Pachman was only able to think in either black or white. Finally, in protest against the refusal to admit him to the archives to see documents about this painful question, he refused Czech citizenship and began living in Germany, only travelling to Prague occasionally. For many émigrés from the totalitarian regimes who were living in the West, the collapse of

communism removed the purpose of their struggle, and for some even the point of their existence. Pachman was probably no exception.

Pachman's life was coming to an end. He had tried religion, he had lived through the wars and cataclysms that the 20th century was so rich in; all that was left were local conflicts. A couple of years ago he lashed out with another angry letter. The cause was the awful noise of a wedding party in a town where some open tournament was taking place, which rudely interrupted his essential concentration during play. He vowed never ever to play again in that town.

Ludek Pachman died in Passau, Germany on March 6, 2003. He was a witness to and a participant in events of last century which are difficult to compare to any others in world history. He knew many very famous people of the last sixty years of the century and he himself was, without doubt, the most noteworthy personality in the bright world of Czech chess. The editor of the Czech chess magazine *SachInfo*, Bretislav Modr, had come to know Ludek Pachman well in the last period of his life. He recalls: 'I expected to see a monster, a former fanatical communist, a man with extreme ideas. In fact Ludek turned out to be very nice, kind and responsive, always ready to help someone else, a person with whom it was interesting to spend time, to talk about anything, to laugh. Although he owned a computer for a few years before his death, he never learnt to use it and he'd call me from time to time asking if I could find an interesting game from the Bundesliga for his column.'

Pachman wasn't much interested in money and wouldn't ask for a fee when he wrote for chess magazines. But sooner or later the pronoun 'I' would appear in whatever piece he was writing. You didn't have to ask him twice to give a simultaneous exhibition or a lecture. And he was indifferent to financial compensation here, too. He himself, his ego, his appearance in front of people (sometimes a large gathering), his name and image were what mattered most of all to him.

When one of the most famous pianists of the last century, Sviatoslav Richter, was incurably ill, he saw a film about his life and said: 'That's me.' And, after much thought, 'I'm not pleased with myself', and, again, 'I'm not pleased... I'm not pleased with myself.' I don't think Ludek Pachman could ever have said such words about himself.



# A Master with no Name

Evgeny Ruban (1941-1997)

From time immemorial, the photographs of champions have hung in the foyer of St.Petersburg's Chigorin Chess Club. In 1976 the picture of Viktor Kortchnoi disappeared: the three-time champion of the city had requested political asylum in the West. But around five years previously another photograph had been removed from the same place: that of the 1966 champion of Leningrad. Of those who knew him, some have died, some have emigrated, and those who are still alive have too many worries of their own to recall a small star that once flashed across the chess horizon, whose name was connected with a scandalous story.

Minsk, 1957. A meet between the Belorussian houses and palaces of pioneers. The capital of the republic had the right to enter two teams in this competition and the coaches from other cities insisted that both of the capital's teams should play each other in the first round. 'So,' the children had been told at a coaches' meeting, 'the second team goes down to the first team with a score of 0-4, or, in the worst case,  $\frac{1}{2}$ -3 $\frac{1}{2}$ . You get it?'

Thirteen-year-old Alik Kapengut was playing top board in Minsk's second team. Having completely outplayed his opponent, Kapengut was a piece up and, savouring his moral victory, he demonstratively exposed his rook. Next to him there was a sixteen-year-old boy playing on the Grodno team who had seen everything. 'What's going on, they ordered you to throw it?' he asked with a sarcastic smile. The boy with auburn hair and big glasses won that game and the six that followed, finishing on one hundred percent on the top board. The boy's name was Zhenya Ruban.

Two years later, in 1959, at the national youth team championship in Riga, Ruban played on board two for Belorussia. I was playing for Leningrad then. Zhenya had a conflict with his

coaches, who considered his late-night returns and independent behaviour to be a violation of the sporting regime and applied to the board of arbiters to have him removed from the competition. In the Soviet era the phrase 'violation of the sporting regime' usually meant drunkenness or an unacceptable level of individualism. Ruban was disqualified for a year.

This disqualification wasn't the last one of his life. He could drink, he could complain and annoy the arbiter by expressing his opinion: he was sharp-tongued and brusque. If you looked at the results sheets of that time you'd stumble on a minus, signifying a defeat, in the column next to his name, which invariably concealed some story or other. But all the stories, reprimands and disqualifications in his life were child's play compared with the main one still to come.

The name Ruban can be Russian, Belorussian, or Jewish. In his appearance there was something Jewish, but he himself maintained that he wasn't Jewish. 'My parents come from simple Ukrainian stock,' he said. Albert Kapengut recalls that when Ruban came to Minsk and asked his father, a historian, if it made sense for him to enter the history faculty, Kapengut's father, deceived by Ruban's appearance, started saying something about possible difficulties in getting in. Zhenya immediately understood and said with embarrassment, 'You know, I'm a Russian.'

Ruban didn't go to university because he was conscripted. Although Zhenya played chess in army tournaments, he didn't become a master, and it seemed he would disappear in the enormous reservoir of talent that swallowed up the hopes of chess players at the time. His fate was completely changed by his arrival in Leningrad. The six years that Zhenya spent in that city became the happiest of his life. And also the most tragic. He came to Leningrad in 1965 and entered the university's philosophy department. His real chess career also began in Leningrad. He won the quarter-final of the city championship, obtained a master norm in the semi-final and became champion in the final. I played in that championship in 1966 (and lost to him), and I remember him very well.

Ruban always played in a suit, smart, self-disciplined and solemn. There was something of a provincial guy about him; clever, energetic, coming to the big city to conquer it and – conquering it. When I recall those Leningrad years now, I always see him as ironic, sarcastic, at times caustic and cynical. I didn't like him all that much. He looked somehow significant, but at the same time vague and reticent. After he had won that championship he changed. He became more self-assured, more arrogant, thinking of himself as a star. He would come into the club all dressed up wearing a bow tie.

In his mannerisms there was something feline, and his face resembled a big bird, like an eagle owl. The stare of his round eyes only reinforced this impression. A smile would regularly appear on his face; during the game, while he was thinking, he liked to stroke his beard with a characteristic hand movement. This was unusual: few men, especially young men, wore a beard at that time. He liked to judge, interweaving ideas and images and moving from one subject to another, he was verbose, he would begin a phrase, smiling significantly, giving others the right to finish the thought or finishing it himself.

He could wound you for any reason and consciously pick at the wound. All this with a nice smile. No, I can't say that I liked Zhenya Ruban. Some recall that he was very erudite and well-read, but it didn't seem like that to me; most likely it was my own fault that I didn't understand this erudition and couldn't evaluate it.

They say that money is the root of all evil, but you could say the same about the lack of it. Ruban truly was permanently broke. He lived in a student dormitory on a monthly stipend of 32 roubles, then 35. It was impossible to survive on that kind of money, and even though Ruban occasionally made something from chess, he always had to limit himself in every area. Albert Kapengut played him in 1965 at a tournament in Vilnius. He recalls that at the tournament they gave out food vouchers worth two roubles and fifty kopecks a day, but Zhenya Ruban preferred to exchange the vouchers for money, managing for the whole day on yoghurt and a roll.

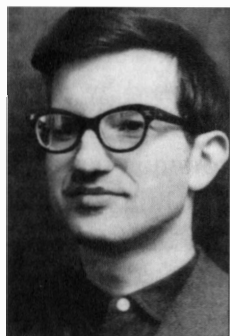
For a Belorussian or even a resident of Moscow or Leningrad, visiting Lithuania was like being abroad, and in the second-hand bookshops of Vilnius you could buy all kinds of books then that you couldn't find in the mother country. Ruban bought books and read them all night long. Philosophers, but not only philosophers – he devoured everything.

Ruban had already started drinking. In the autumn at the Chigorin Club the higher educational institutions' team championship took place on Sundays and he would arrive at the start of a round unsteady on his feet: Saturdays in the dormitory didn't end early at night. On those occasions one of the reserve team members would immediately be sent out for beer, or Zhenya himself would get himself a hair of the dog if there was time. Even with a hangover he played strongly.

In the semi-final of the Soviet Championship in 1966 Ruban arrived after a very heavy drinking binge and at first he just needed to get himself together: he lost the first four games. Such a start can break even the greatest optimist, and a pessimist would reconsider the expediency of continuing his chess career and even the purpose of life in general. Ruban carried on playing as if nothing had happened and in the end shared fourth place in the event, missing qualification for the final by only half a point.

The following year in Rostov-on-Don he played in the national tournament for young masters. This was his first time in such strong company, and Ruban felt quite confident: he finished on plus two. He beat the eventual winner Vladimir Tukmakov in a good strategic game. It would be Tukmakov's only defeat in the event. Ruban could exploit an initiative well, played very clearly and logically and, as is often the case with chess players who have a classical style, his results as White were much better than with Black. In Rostov he won all his games as White, but only managed one draw with the black pieces.

Along with his opening knowledge he was able to exploit a positional advantage. Most likely this was the influence of Isaac Boleslavsky, who enjoyed unconditional authority in Belorussia. In the sixties the republic's strongest chess players often gathered



Evgeny Ruban (above):  
ironic, sarcastic, at times  
arrogant. This was the photo-  
graph that was removed from  
the Chigorin Chess Club.

Left: Wherever Ruban lived,  
Chita, Kostroma or  
Volkovyssk, he would  
become city champion.



After many hardships, Ruban went back to Grodno to live with his mother, playing chess until he came to a tragic end. The letters 'KMS' above his name signify the title 'Candidate Master of Sport', as his master title had been taken from him.

at his house to discuss theoretical problems and research openings. Ruban, too, attended these meetings. His chess was characterised by pragmatism and the wonderful use of forced plans. If you add to this quality a rather good endgame technique and common sense in combination with the will to win, you can say that Ruban was at that time a strong master with hopeful prospects. After obtaining his university degree in 1970 he was accepted as a postgraduate student.

On a white night in Leningrad in a small public garden near the Moskovskiye Vorota metro station, Zhenya Ruban met a young metal worker from the Kirov Factory. They shared a bottle of vodka and some processed cheese. He tried to talk the worker into having sex, offering him 10 roubles. For some reason the worker hadn't been paid for a long time and needed money. It was completely light and the late-night visitors to the garden, outraged by the open spectacle, tried to get the young men to behave. The two men wouldn't calm down and in their drunken racket told the onlookers where to go. They called the police.

About what happened in the police van, accounts differ. Some assert that Zhenya suggested that the police settle the matter with love, not only in the figurative but also in the direct sense, while others claim that the worker demanded the payment he'd been promised from Zhenya, and Ruban replied that the worker had not even come, and he himself hadn't felt anything. The worker confirmed this by saying that the police had interrupted him, and so Zhenya advised the worker to get his money from the police. I don't know which version is the real one, but I think the second one seems more realistic and the dialogue between Ruban and the worker wasn't apocryphal.

The worker showed remorse, blaming it all on the vodka and promising that it would never happen again, and he was released on bail, while Zhenya was seized with ambition; getting involved in a discussion with the investigators he referred to Socrates, he talked about the tolerant attitude towards homosexuals in the upper echelons of ancient Greek society and claimed that erotic re-

lations with young men were intellectual in their own way, quoting Plato. As examples he put forward Leonardo da Vinci and Marcel Proust. But the investigators weren't interested in what the ancient Greeks did, and they hadn't read Proust.

Judges have never in any era liked philosophers appearing before them starting polemics. They don't like people being arrogant and ironic, trying to explain something to them, making them think. Neither Socrates nor the One whose name has been given to one of the world's main religions reduced their sentence by behaving this way in court. Nor did Oscar Wilde, who knew what the charge threatened him with, but decided he was more educated and witty than the judge and could defend himself with caustic aphorisms. If he had shown remorse, Ruban could also have cut himself a deal, been let out on bail, or, in the worst case, the incident could have been classified as minor hooliganism. But he continued sticking to his guns, and the fly-wheel spun; it could only have been stopped by some weighty command from above, but no such command was forthcoming.

The fact of the matter is that Ruban wasn't judged for the lifestyle that he had led and stubbornly defended during the investigation and in court, but for hooliganism. The authorities generally tried to avoid using Article 121 and the word 'homosexuality' and only did so in exceptional cases. But the silence about homosexuality in the Soviet Union didn't make it go away.

In court Ruban talked about a professor who had introduced him to gay sex when he was in dire financial straits, and how he hadn't regretted it, because it had showed him who he really was. He didn't admit guilt and, contrary to the remorseful metal worker, didn't ask for forgiveness. According to witnesses, his final declaration was, 'I am grateful to the Soviet court that is sending me to a camp, because people like me are needed there!' They gave him the full whack: four years under the article on 'hooliganism committed with extreme cynicism'.

When Ruban was arrested, rumours began to spread around the city that he'd been taken for his politics and in revenge for this they'd framed him for a common crime. This wasn't the

case, he was no dissident. However, while he wasn't a dissident in the literal sense of the word, he was one in reality. The most important and decisive factor in determining the crime of a non-conformist was their 'otherness': anyone who thought differently, wrote differently, behaved differently or loved differently was by definition a threat to a country where everyone had to do everything the same way.

Ruban was released early and exiled to a settlement, a form of half-freedom. When his sentence ended he returned to Belorussia and began playing in tournaments again. They took his master title from him, but they didn't disqualify him, because a disqualification would have required an explanation, and this was something that couldn't be written down in any instruction. So officially he wasn't disqualified and the authorities did not forbid him to play in the republic championship either. They came up with a ridiculous compromise: the Grodno resident could play in the Belorussian championship, but outside the competition.

Outstripping the runner-up, master Vladimir Veremeichik, by half a point, Ruban won this championship. The meeting of the republic's chess federation after the victory was stormy. Lots of people wanted to award the title of champion to Ruban, but there was also fierce opposition. In the end the opinion of the master Veresov prevailed. He said, 'What are you thinking? Do you want a pederast to be declared champion of the republic? Do you understand how they'll look on us after this? In the committee, and everywhere else? No, this can't be!' And Veremeichik was declared champion.

Ruban got some documents together and sent a request to Leningrad for the federation of the city where he had been champion to support a petition to restore his master title. The necessary papers were certified by the committee of the factory where Ruban was working. A discussion of the letter took place in the office of Naum Khodorov, the director of the Chigorin Club. 'What shall we do, comrades?' Khodorov asked. 'As the workers' collective has put in a request, we have to give them



some kind of reply.' Silence. 'So what are your views, what should we do? You don't know? Here's what!' Khodorov exclaimed. Screwing up the letter, he threw it into the bin.

Ruban himself made some trips to Leningrad and wanted to stay there. For that he needed a *propiska*, a residence permit, as Soviet citizens weren't free to move where they liked. He tried to get work as a security guard, to at least get a temporary *propiska* for his first months. He also looked into arranging a fictitious marriage, which he'd already failed to do once before. But both of these attempts were unsuccessful and Ruban had to return to Belorussia. 'I'll have to live out my days in your swamp,' Zhenya sighed when he returned to Grodno. They never returned his master title. In the directory of chess players that appeared in 1983 in the Soviet Union, the name Ruban was simply absent: there never was a chess player with that name.

Zhenya couldn't get work anywhere: there was an indelible stain on such a person, and it would have been easier for an amnestied bandit or a murderer who had served his sentence to find work. He was branded, and in freedom he remained an outcast and a pariah. Finally he got work as an orderly in a hospital morgue, then he managed to become a lighting technician at the Russian drama theatre. He told a few acquaintances that he had written a play. Others say he wrote crime novels.

Although at the theatre they understood that the floodlights were operated by a philosopher and a writer, and treated him with respect, there was as always a distance between Ruban and those around him and he didn't have any close friends. A close association and especially a friendship with such a person would mark the other, too, and couldn't bring any good. From time to time he would encounter contempt, chuckles and smirks, not always behind his back.

Some time at the end of the 1970s they gave him a new sentence, two years, and sent him to a camp again. Then they exiled him again. Wherever Ruban lived – Chita, Kostroma, Volkovyssk – he played chess and became the champion of all these cities.

When he returned to Grodno he worked for a while as an instructor in the chess club, but he didn't last long there because he was sacked for drunkenness. But he kept coming to the club and would sit there all day long, reading books that he'd borrowed from the city library. Philosophy, art, crime novels, everything he could get his hands on. Young Belorussian chess players who met Ruban recall that no one in the republic could equal his level of development, his knowledge of philosophy and literature; standing out from the general grey background, Ruban seemed like a goldmine of information to them.

Ruban wasn't fastidious and never refused gifts: a shabby suit, old boots, he would accept them gratefully, although he could immediately drink them away. He drank every day. In large quantities. Vodka was good, but there were also drinks that weren't sold in the wine sections of department stores. He didn't bother with snacks, but often drank on an empty stomach. He drank with anyone who would agree to it. Some paid this way for lessons, some for blitz games, and others just for the company and conversation of a chess player who had once been well-known. Once he won a prize in Minsk and bought his mother a present, but he never managed to get it home as he drank away the money and the present.

His nervous system was completely worn out, he was prone to mood swings and frequently couldn't control himself. One time he went into the Minsk chess club and started a row, recalling the past and shouting obscenities at a master who had been involved in his disqualification back in 1959. He was already a completely changed, scruffily dressed, filthy, flabby, broken man. This is how Leningraders who saw Ruban in Grodno at the end of the eighties remember him. He could question them for hours about the city where he'd spent his brightest years, and he would reminisce about chess, or rather, his chess acquaintances.

Ruban lived in a small two-bedroom apartment with his elderly mother on her miserable pension in complete, overwhelming poverty. The rumour about his participation in some

kind of 'business' during this period is not true, unless you want to use the word to describe his activity of selling at the market utensils that someone had brought from Poland in order to immediately drink away his share of the earnings that same evening. A couple of times he played in some opens in Poland, as Grodno is just a stone's throw away from the border, but his best years were long gone, his health was utterly destroyed, and although he was only a little over fifty then, his life had almost all been lived.

Eventually, drunk, he was hit by a car. They took him to hospital. His condition was critical for two weeks, then he began to recover, but suddenly he died. His mother had no money for a funeral; it was paid for by the woman who had been driving the car that hit him. There was no one to bury him, either. None of his former drinking buddies could find the time, so the coffin containing his body was carried by Vladimir Veremeichik and three of his pupils from the local chess school.

The official date of Ruban's death as recorded in his files was November 17, 1997, but this isn't correct: Veremeichik recalls that it was a warm day in early autumn, and the trees were still quite green. They buried him outside the city limits, about thirteen kilometres away, so keepers of Biblical tradition have nothing to worry about here. The place has no name, everyone just calls it the Cemetery. There is a plaque with his name on it, but no monument, of course.

After his death the former director of the local drama theatre came to Grodno. By then he was living in the United States and said that Ruban's play had been published there and apparently even performed somewhere; he wanted to give a royalty to Zhenya's mother, but it was too late. In St.Petersburg the Krylya (Wings) association, which campaigns on behalf of sexual minorities, is now based at a short distance from the Chigorin Club, where Ruban went so often.

Hesiod said he would rather have died sooner or been born later. Who knows what Zhenya Ruban's fate would have been if he had been born in a different country, or in the same country

thirty years or so later? Thirty years is only an instant for immortal Kronos, but it's almost everything when you talk about the life of an adult. Would he have been a philosopher, as he had wanted to be all his life? A historian? A writer? A chess player? No one knows. We don't choose our times, we live and die in them. As did Ruban.

# A Miracle

Ratmir Kholmov (1925-2006)

The world of literature, music and theatre has its own internal value system. In this world there are names that are barely known to the wider public, but highly esteemed by their professional colleagues. In chess there are such names, too. One of them is Ratmir Kholmov.

In his long career Ratmir Kholmov has won quite a few tournaments and been among the prize-winners in countless events on every level. He won the Soviet Championship together with Spassky and Stein. He has an even score with Anatoly Karpov and he has beaten Robert Fischer. In the sixties and seventies he battled all the strongest chess players in the world and none of them could assume that the outcome was a foregone conclusion. He had a reputation as one of the best defensive players, but you can't accumulate many points by defence alone, not even by the most superb defence. Ratmir Kholmov was also a master of attack, the kind of attack in which improvisation and fantasy plays the most important part.

In chess history you can find many brilliant games, and here, as in art, there are no objective criteria: some like the intricate lace of Capablanca's games, others the attacks of Mikhail Tal. But on lists of the most beautiful games in the long history of chess the 'defender' Kholmov's wonderful games against Keres in 1959 and Bronstein in 1964 appear again and again.

'He has outstanding natural talent, the kind that comes from above', Viktor Kortchnoi says of Kholmov. 'The originality of his talent is evident to the naked eye. This was the kind of talent Capablanca had. Kholmov knew something about chess without studying it at all.'

To this day Kholmov still has the patience for defence, in passive, unpromising positions that most masters fear like the devil. In an attempt to obtain some slight chances they prefer to

quickly create a crisis, to rush onwards, sometimes not hesitating to sacrifice material. Kholmov is different: he is a master of passive defence, which he can continue painstakingly for dozens of moves, waiting for his moment. How did this unusual style develop, and where does this amazing stubbornness come from?

In the war year of 1943 the young riveter's mate Ratmir Kholmov was eighteen years old. When at the end of a hard ten-hour working day, no longer able to stand the heat from the molten lead that ceaselessly dripped on his face and the constant blows of the heavy hammer reverberating through the metal rivet into his body, he started crying, an older worker scolded him: 'Pull yourself together, Ratmir, it's worse at the front!' This phrase 'pull yourself together' he never forgot, and it is the key to an understanding of Kholmov's chess style, and the rest of his life, too.

I talk with Ratmir Dmitrievich Kholmov in the Rossiya Hotel in Moscow, where he is playing in the Aeroflot tournament. There is still something in him from the Kholmov of the fifties and sixties: he's sturdily built, with a steep, high forehead, the shape of his fleshy biceps visible under an old-fashioned jacket. Except perhaps there is now grey in his slightly curly, unparted, combed back hair. In a few months he will be 80 years old. A couple of years ago he suffered a very severe stroke, but he has recovered and is playing chess again. His opponents in the tournament are young enough to be his grandchildren, and some could be his great-grandchildren. There is no doubt that most have never heard of him. Today's game has ended in a quick draw, and we have time for a conversation.

'I was born on May 13, 1925 in the town of Shenkursk. That's in northern Russia in the Arkhangelsk region. My father worked for the NKVD (predecessor to the KGB – G.S.) at the well-known camp in Solovki. That's where I spent my childhood. My mother also worked there, and of course they were both party members. My father drank a lot. In 1929 they arrested him for having relations with a woman prisoner and sent him to help build the Belomor-Baltic Canal, while we went back to Arkhangelsk.

'I was the only child in the family, but when mum and I came home, I found that I had a brother. He was five years older than me. It turned out that my mother had given birth to him before she met my father, left him in a village somewhere, and my father didn't even know anything about it. Later, when my father returned, of course he didn't like it much. My brother was sent to prison camps from a young age and was all over Pechora (one of the main camp complexes – G.S.), and later there was talk that he was a policeman for the Germans during the war, and some say that after the war he ran off to Germany, but I don't know anything about what happened to him.

'At that time my mother was working in a colony for juvenile offenders. We also lived in the colony with the young criminals. I was a hooligan myself, too. I often heard what they were talking about: some wise guy shows up, let's rob him, or take his bedclothes or something. I left school when I was a teenager and didn't get a good upbringing or a good education. When I gave up school and told my mother that I didn't want to study any more, I was going to be an apprentice electrician. She told me: go and work, any profession is respectable in this country. She piously believed in the communist ideas and fantasies.

'I learnt to play chess by accident. When I was twelve I was on a steamship with some other kids, going to a young pioneer camp, and someone said, 'Do you guys want to learn how to keep score?' What kind of score, I thought. It was about chess. So I learnt to play chess. First I took on my neighbour, and he gave me bishop and knight odds and easily won. Then I went to the house of pioneers. Within three years I became city champion among adults. In those days I played whenever I had spare time, and I also went out with pals. My pals also played chess, mainly blitz. We didn't have clocks, so we made moves on command: one, two, three, four, five – move! And we moved! They brought beer with them, thick, velvety beer. In buckets. We scooped it straight from the bucket with ladles and drank it. I drank too, and I also started smoking.

'The war began and in the spring of '42 I was assigned as an

apprentice to a machine operator on a fishing trawler. By the end of the voyage I was absolutely sick of fish. I remember this 'snack', freshly heated cod-liver oil with bread crumbled into it. And in the autumn of that year I became a prisoner. After an illness I didn't want to go back to the shipyard and I got four months in a camp. At first they gave each prisoner 300 grams of bread a day. But they let me out and I returned to Arkhangelsk.

'Then I trained as a machine operator, I qualified and they assigned me as a riveter's mate. They transferred us to the Far East, so I found myself in Vladivostok. I ended up on the tanker *Sovietskaya Gavan* that was headed for America. We arrived in Portland, Oregon, lived there for a month, then we travelled around the whole country by train and finished up in San Diego. And in '43 America seemed like a real paradise to me. I was so amazed by the country that I forgot all about chess. Only then I began thinking about why they lived so incomparably better than us...

'On our way back to the USSR, to Petropavlovsk, we got caught in a terrible storm near Vladivostok which blew us onto a Japanese mine that flung us to the Japanese shore, and they interned us. The Japanese rushed out to come and look at us, including the women and children. We lived on our half-sunken ship for six weeks, quite close to the Soviet shore, and we had an abundance of grub. Then the tanker *Tuapse* came for us and life on that ship was like a fairy-tale – you turned on the tap and pure spirits flowed out of it.

'At the end of '44 they revoked the documents that allowed me to go on foreign voyages as a sailor. But I was happy that I'd got off lightly, as all the guys who'd been prisoners of the Germans were sent straight to camps, and I've met many of them. Then they assigned me to the steamship *Arkhangelsk*. I worked as a fireman, standing in the boiler-house steam, it was hell. Later I also worked as a chimney-sweep and did practically everything else.

'After the war I went back to Arkhangelsk, became a chess instructor on the Sports Committee, won the city championship



again and travelled to Tula for the national first-category championship. There I met Lyublinsky, Klaman and Furman for the first time – we could only dream of the candidate master title. I came fifth in that tournament. In 1947 I won the national Candidates' tournament and became a master. In the same year I reached the final of the 16th Soviet Championship, then I played in Moscow in the Chigorin Memorial Tournament. There I played Botvinnik for the first time and I had the feeling that I was playing God. I remember that I strained every nerve during the game, I even pressed myself into my chair, but it didn't help. I lost, of course, he was in a different class then and I didn't know any theory at all.

'The following year they allocated me a stipend of 1,200 roubles, good money in those days. So I became a chess professional. I was 23 years old. How did I prepare for games? I didn't. Before a game I would toss a coin to decide how I would open the game. I never followed any trends. Everyone says I'm a defender, a congenital defender... You'll become a defender if you don't know any theory and you regularly get bad positions after the opening. You'll potter about – as Black, almost always – in your own trenches.

'I never studied chess at all, except when I looked at something in team trainings with Mikenas and Vistanetskis when I lived in Lithuania. I remember, Mikenas told me – this was published in the magazine *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, there was an article on this variation. So I began subscribing to that magazine. From '59, I remember it exactly, when I was almost a grandmaster already. What did I do all day long at that time? Nothing, I played in tournaments and read books. Anything I could get my hands on. I liked Feuchtwanger, Dreiser, O'Henry and the Russian classics.

'In '49 I played in the national championship. The tournament was very strong – Smyslov, Bronstein, Keres, Lilienthal, Flohr, Boleslavsky, I don't even remember them all. Young people also played – Petrosian, Geller and Taimanov. Before the last round I was on 50 percent and had to play Black against Geller. To everyone's surprise he was in the lead, half a point ahead of Smyslov

and Bronstein, and if he won he would take clear first place. So Mikenas comes up to me before the game, we were friends at the time, and he says, Bronstein is offering some amount of money – I don't remember now how much it was – if you don't lose to Geller in the last round. I think he mentioned a smaller amount than what Bronstein had promised, as Mikki was a sly rogue... (laughs). But I not only didn't lose to Geller, I beat him!

'In '60, when they put me up for the grandmaster title, Botvinnik himself spoke against it. 'Let's wait a bit,' Mikhail Moiseyevich said, 'let Kholmov play for another year or two and demonstrate his class.' By then I had been among the prize-winners in national championships and won more than one international tournament. That was how they awarded the grandmaster title in those days! And now look at what they do, it's completely idiotic, this race after grandmaster titles. It's nonsense. I read recently that Russia got 22 new grandmasters in one year. A candidate master becomes a grandmaster within a year. And they are proud of this. They should be crying, not celebrating.

'In 1951 Bronstein was preparing for his match with Botvinnik and he invited me to play a training match. We played four games, three were drawn and I won the other one. I remember the opening of that game – the King's Indian Defence. Where are the score sheets from this game now? God knows, I didn't keep them, perhaps Bronstein has them somewhere in his archive.

'I underestimated myself in those days, believing that all the other chess players were potentially stronger. So it turned out that Bronstein played a World Championship match in '51 and I was disqualified in the same year. For what? We were sitting around at a tournament, that's Tarasov, Nezhmetdinov and me, drinking, and two chicks came up to us. Well, Rashid was kind of in the way, he was about fifteen years older than Tarasov and me. You turn off the tape recorder now, turn it off, can you imagine if my wife reads this...

'Anyway, basically, Rashid was flushed, he was drunk, of course, he went out to the balcony and started throwing crockery

off it – vases and plates. When Nezhmetdinov drank he had all kinds of psychoses, he'd lie down under a tram or do some other dumb thing. On this occasion nothing would have happened, other than the noise of the plates, but Kotov had to stick his nose into it. He started asking questions and whatever. There was an uproar, and the police came. To cut a long story short, they summoned all three of us to Moscow, to see Rodionov, who was chairman of the Sports Committee. Nezhmetdinov grovelled before him and they decided to pardon him as he was a party member, but Tarasov and I were disqualified for a year. They also cancelled my stipend, which I received as a member of the national team.

'I never travelled to the capitalist countries until perestroika. Never. In my life, who didn't I write appeals to, I wrote to everyone except Stalin. And I never got any reply. They sent me to Yugoslavia, to Cuba too, but then Cuba was ours, you see. Many times I had the documents ready to travel to capitalist countries many, but at the last minute they would refuse me. That's why my name is completely unknown in the West, as I have never played there once. In Moscow the Sports Committee always said at the last minute – 'Unfortunately, they haven't issued you a passport...' And go complain to whomever you like. How and why I fell into this trap, I still don't know. True, I had been a prisoner of the Japanese for more than a month in '43, but there was no longer any war with Japan. Maybe they thought the Japanese had recruited me during that time? I don't know.

'In 1977 I go to the Sports Committee and the same woman functionary says to me, 'You've been turned down again, Ratmir Dmitrievich. You know, if you go and see the KGB man, perhaps he'll explain it to you.' So I went to see the KGB man. I go in. I ask why they won't give me a passport. He says, 'Write an appeal, and don't forget to mention all the mistakes you've made, for starters. Then perhaps you'll get permission, you'll travel all over the world.' But what did he mean? What mistakes? I got out to Germany for the first time in '89, when perestroika had al-



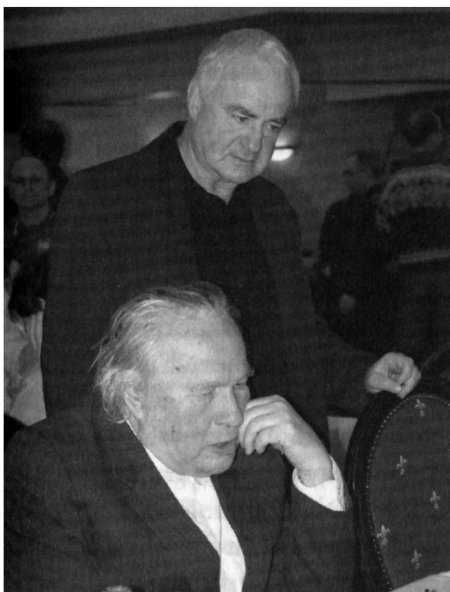
Ratmir Kholmov,  
the sturdy  
defender, during  
his glory days in  
the 1960s.



'Karpov is outstanding too, although personally I rate Kasparov more highly.'



Kholmov and Tal did not only meet at the chessboard, they also got real life. 'Misha was a pure genius, of course.'



With the author at the Aeroflot Open, Moscow 2004: 'Can I say that chess gave me everything in life? Yes, of course.'

ready begun, there was some Open on, and they told me to go, to get my documents ready.

‘Yes, probably. Probably my game with Keres in ’59 was one of my best. After this game people asked me if it was all home preparation. Preparation! I thought for 50 minutes over the 12th move, from that moment on I had to thoroughly consider all the variations, as the knight couldn’t move back. There’s your preparation. The combination against Bronstein in the Soviet Championship of ’64 also worked out beautifully.

‘Yes, you could say that starting with Botvinnik I have played all the world champions. Who made the strongest impression? Well, Botvinnik was a monument, of course, a giant. Petrosian? It goes without saying that Petrosian was a wonderful player, but he played very stingily, to limit you, he was tight-fisted at the board – no, that’s not for me. Kasparov is an outstanding champion, of course, one of the most outstanding in the history of chess. Karpov is outstanding, too, although personally I rate Kasparov more highly.

‘How did I beat Fischer? That was in ’65 in Cuba, when Fischer was playing by telex and they were transmitting his moves from New York. I was under a lot of pressure during that game, understanding that if I lost, they’d set all the dogs on me, they’d remember everything, and the evening before that game in particular. Why? The bar in the hotel was open all night and I was drinking Bacardi as you do. This rum is marvellous in Cuba. It was already very late when Smyslov came looking for me. Let’s go, Ratmir, he says, I’ll show you a variation that you can play against Fischer tomorrow. We went up to Smyslov’s room and he showed me a new idea in the Chigorin Variation of the Spanish, but I was so drunk that Vasily Vasilievich was sure I wouldn’t remember anything.

‘I sit down to play the next day and think to myself, what did you do yesterday, there’ll be hell to pay for your behaviour, and it had to be right before the game with Fischer. They’ll say, you son of a bitch, you were drunk as a skunk. I sit there, gritting my teeth and clenching my fists, not getting up from the chair. So

you can imagine, the entire variation that we'd looked at that night came on the board. After the game Fischer congratulated me, but we didn't discuss the game. In that tournament in Havana there were many strong grandmasters among the 22 participants, but I didn't lose a single game and only missed first place by half a point.

'Chess has become a business. I remember, about forty years ago some chess player from Indonesia came to Yugoslavia, he really wanted to become a grandmaster, so they took him down a few notches and told him to bring more dollars next time. But nowadays you can set yourself up as a grandmaster within a year if you have a fat wallet... We have this Pushkov, for example. I was at the tournament in Azov where they made him a grandmaster. And he got there very easily, yes... And one day they say to me, will you play in a tournament for grandmaster norms, the pay is \$300. I think, why not play? Great, they say, so you don't actually have to play. What do you mean, I say. We'll make a tournament table, they say, you'll get your payment, and that's it... No, I reply, that's not for me, I'm not interested in these shady dealings. They think that if I like drinking, I'll do anything.

'It's true that I used to drink, and drink a lot, so to say. Would I have achieved more sporting successes if it hadn't been for the drinking? I guess so, because afterwards there's always a certain moral breakdown, somewhere inside you realise that you're doing something wrong. No, it's not the headache on the next day, it's just that I would feel ashamed of myself, I cursed myself and played less confidently, because with all my heart I felt I was deviating from moral principles.

'A few years ago I had a stroke. When this happened to me my wife brought a priest to the house, she paid him, and he read a prayer for the dying over me, as I was unconscious, dying. The priest administered extreme unction and sprinkled holy water on me, everything you're supposed to do. I hadn't been baptised though, my father and mother were communists, and real communists. Am I a believer now? No, I never was and I still don't believe in God today. I think it's all deception and illusion. Any-

way, I was lying there in a complete coma for two weeks. Like a puppet, I did not move. And for the entire two weeks when I was in intensive care, my wife never left me for a second, she dragged me right back from the next world, and if it hadn't been for her, her devotion and love, I wouldn't be here. This, of course, is a gift of fate, getting such a wonderful wife.

'I don't remember anything of those two weeks. No, there were no visions, no chess, no light at the end of the tunnel, only once I saw myself when I was young on a ship, we were fishing, and the nets were ever so shallow, and we caught crabs in them. And there was some island in the distance. My early youth. When I regained consciousness, they asked me my first name and surname, I remember that very well, but I don't remember much else. Then I went home, New Year's was just around the corner and I ask the neuropathologist if I can just drink some champagne. He says all drinking is forbidden. So I called the surgeon, the one who did the operation, and asked him the same question, as, you know, it was New Year's. This surgeon says, what champagne, down a glass of vodka and don't have any champagne... (laughs)

'No, I don't go to veterans' tournaments, you have to invest a thousand dollars for a tournament, with travel, hotel and everything else, and where would I get that much money? Ilyumzhinov doesn't give me money, he rules like a khan, he gives money to some people when he wants to, and he doesn't give it to others...

A few years ago we had the default here and although my wife immediately sensed it when our bank moved from luxurious premises in the city centre to some stable and she withdrew almost all our money in good time, we lost a few thousand dollars because of this default. You used to get 36 percent interest on the money that was in the bank, you old sod, my son said to me at the time, and now you've got your default. But what's a default? You're a westerner, you can explain it to me, what does this default thing mean?

'My son is a decent bloke, he often visits his parents, as he should. No, he doesn't play chess, I mean, he plays, of course, I



give him queen odds, but he enjoys solving chess problems. Grandchildren, great-grandchildren, it's all well and good. I have everything. I have one grandson, a big businessman. He has started his own company. He builds saunas for rich people and often goes to Finland.

'Higher education, higher education, they say, but I look around and wonder what this higher education is for? And chess in schools? Karpov and Kasparov campaign for this, to make chess a part of universal education. To make chess a compulsory subject in schools. It's completely idiotic. Imagine, there'd be no firemen or machine operators in engine-rooms, no salespeople, everyone would be playing chess.

'Now that I'm retired, I get even more pleasure out of chess than when I was playing for real. Then I had a certain lack of self-confidence in life, I worried about everything – them taking my stipend away, not sending me to some tournament, there was always some kind of fuss and worry. Now I calmly study chess for myself, for my own enjoyment. I play, too. For example, last year I played a Pole, Markowski. His rating is 150 points higher than mine, so what? This game didn't make much of an impression on me – during the entire game I easily held the position, but then I had a bit of bad luck, I ran out of time. And I should add that this was the first time in my life that I ran out of time. That electronic clock – you can't see what's happening on it. On the old-fashioned clocks everything's clear, when the flag goes up you're in time-trouble, you quickly make a couple of moves, but with the new ones...

'I was a member of the Komsomol in my day, but no, never a party member. Ever since I was a child I've had an aversion to this collectivism. From childhood. I never particularly liked the Communist government, although I wasn't a dissident, except when I was talking crap in drinking binges. Perhaps that's why they did not let me go abroad, I don't know.

'No, I don't think that Russia will ever become a normal country. This will never happen because of the type of people we have, a subjugated people. For the past sixty or seventy years

we've lived in abject slavery and it will take a very long time to get this out of our system.

'Once I thought to myself, we Russians are all defective in some way. They say, you've got Tolstoy, you've got Chekhov, you've got Tchaikovsky, but so what? And the other thing I have noticed is this colossal aping of the West. They start something over there, we all copy it immediately. And what about Putin? How did I vote in the election? The way I used to prepare for games, I tossed a coin and voted for whichever party it indicated. Putin would have won anyway, it was all decided in advance. I'm nearly 80, I'm going to die soon, I can say what I think.

'How do I spend my day? I get up at exactly eight o'clock. I used to take a cold shower, but later the doctors advised me not to, they said it could be dangerous for my heart, so now I only get wet up to my waist. Then I have breakfast, a little herring and hot potato, and I drink tea or coffee with milk. Without sugar? What do you mean? Of course with sugar, how can you drink tea or coffee without sugar? At nine o'clock I go to the toilet with my English dictionary and spend half an hour in there. I'm learning the language. I've been learning it for sixty years already, I'm perfecting it.

'Then I sit down at my desk and analyse until noon, and I always enjoy this a lot. A computer? I'm almost 80, what computer should I have, why on earth would I need it? Recently I've been wrestling with a variation in the Evans Gambit, shall I send you the analysis? It's incredibly interesting! The only game with this variation was Morphy-Andersen 1858, and Andersen won it! And for some reason no one ever played like that again. No one. I sit by myself, analyse, then write it all down, check it again and type it all out. Then I put it all away in my desk. But I don't publish it anywhere. I don't want to send my analyses anywhere, and believe me, I have some very deep ones.

'At exactly noon I eat apples. It's well-known that apples are very good for your health. Then I look at some more chess or I read. All kinds of rubbish, crime novels and that sort of thing. In the evening I have dinner and watch television, that's my whole

life. Do any chess players call me? No, never. Why not? Because I'm almost 80, because my rating is 2440, because I'm shit and no one needs me.

'So Kortchnoi called me a genius along with Capablanca. But for me Alekhine was a pure genius, there was always inspiration from God in his games. My first chess book, which I got hold of accidentally, was one of Alekhine's, *On the Road to the World Championship*. And of those I knew personally, Misha Tal was a pure genius, of course, and so was Lenya Stein. Ah, my dear Lenechka, he used to play cards night after night without a break, there would be a knock on the door of my hotel room at five in the morning, and I'd say, who is it, and it would be Lenya, he'd finished playing cards, and he'd ask, could you find me something to eat, he'd got hungry.

'Do you remember when the three of us were together in Riga, when I was playing the training match with Misha, and we spent every evening together? And we had dinner at Misha's or went to some restaurant or other. What year was that, '68, I think? I was forty-something then, and you were just a young lad, do you remember? Ah, Gennochka, do you remember when we shared a hotel room in Riga for two weeks? Do you remember when Lenya and Misha brought you back like a drunken corpse, true, they weren't too steady on their feet either, and they put you on a table and you slept on the table the whole night? I still can't understand why they put you on the table and not in bed, but you slept the whole night on the table anyway. But you can cut this out, God knows what people will think of you. Gennochka, these are memories of our youth, our youth...

'When I come here to the hotel I sit down at the board happily, but I'm already tired, it takes an hour and a half to get here. The metro with one change takes an hour and a quarter, then another fifteen minutes on the bus, and it's the same on the way back, every day, so work it out. It wouldn't matter if it weren't for the stairs at the exit of the metro, they're all covered with ice and they're very slippery, I keep slipping on them. From time to time you fall down and can't put all your bones back together...

I'd gladly have stayed in the hotel during the tournament, damn the expense, but at home I have everything right where I need it, my life is all arranged, my wife takes care of me.

'You ask if I'm satisfied with life? I've just been lucky, I wasn't killed when the boiler blew up back then near the Kuriles, I did not die from severe bronchial asthma, when I couldn't talk and I was suffocating for months, and you can't count all the scrapes I've been in during my life, but the most important thing is that I've got a fantastic wife and family, son, grandson, now a great-granddaughter too – that's also wonderful...

'Can I say that chess gave me everything in life? Yes, of course. Now I'm on a pension, the chess federation also gives me something, my wife also has an income, so there's nothing to complain about. But it's not only about money, I also have something to do that I enjoy. And not everyone has that. Other people retire and they're left with nothing to do, so they die quickly, because they don't know how to occupy themselves. But I have chess, it rescues me to this day. You know, analysis is analysis, but playing, playing is still what I really want to do. Chess is a miracle, of course. A miracle.'

*Postscript: Ratmir Dmitrievich Kholmov died after a second stroke, from which he did not recover, in Moscow, February 18th, 2006.*

# Killer Instinct

The prominent Austrian scientist and Nobel laureate Konrad Lorenz gave his classic treatise *On Aggression* the sub-title 'So-called evil'. He argued that aggression is an ancient innate instinct characteristic of all higher species, including the human being. In itself aggression is neither bad nor good – it is completely natural for homo sapiens and the same as any other instinct. What's more, in chess it is an indispensable attribute that no player can do without.

Aggression has never been a stranger to chess. Like any other sport, chess provides an outlet for emotions that are restrained in everyday life and most sporting successes have been achieved by passionate, determined people who outstripped their rivals by doing everything possible to reach their goal. Sport cannot eradicate aggression, but it can teach people to consciously control their natural pugilistic instincts. Alas, this doesn't always happen. In his book *Homo Ludens*, the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga writes of 'frequent disputes in the 15th century at the chess board between young princes, in which, in the words of La Marche, 'even the most refined lose their temper'.' Moving on to France again in the 20th century, we may recall the games of International Master Gilles Andruet, which often ended in fights, for example the ones with Bachar Kouatly or Jean-Luc Seret. Here it is tempting to mention that in 1995 at the age of 37, Andruet was tragically murdered, but in actual fact this had nothing to do with his chess.

In everyday life aggression tends to evoke negative associations, but the opposite holds true in chess. 'Possessing an aggressive style, like a street fighter, always ready to get into a brawl, he brightens up any tournament', a journalist seeking colourful comparisons wrote about Tony Miles's style of play.

Chess, however, not only opens the valve for aggression to flow in its individual and egoistical manifestations, but also

brings about heightened animation and excitement. Some chess players have to prepare themselves for this condition before the start of the duel, while for others it is instinctive and the transition to this condition is natural.

All chess players deal with this constantly charged condition during the game in their own way. Some need to train themselves internally, others have this ability as an aspect of their personality. At the end of the 1970s, during the absolute reign of Anatoly Karpov, when he lost a trivial card game to a colleague grandmaster at a tournament, he kept asking for a rematch until he got what he wanted.

‘Why did you need this?’, asked his second, Mikhail Podgaets, who was surprised at this ridiculous waste of time and energy.

‘So that he wouldn’t think, today I beat Karpov at the card table, tomorrow I’ll secure a victory in the tournament game too’, Anatoly Evgenievich replied.

At the Interpolis tournament in Tilburg, Karpov could play pinball for hours on end, and when he had no one to play with, he would do battle with the machine by himself and try to beat his own record. A pointless waste of time? What should we say? When he competed he was intensifying the playing moment further, strengthening his fighting spirit, which is essential in chess.

Constantly striving for victory, conducting the fight aggressively, the chess player must acquire these qualities from childhood if they don’t come naturally. A quarter of a century ago, before one of the Tilburg tournaments, Boris Spassky said to me, ‘You understand perfectly what’s going on at the board, you get juicy positions. Why do you offer draws? Promise me that you won’t offer a draw in any of your games, except, of course, in obvious cases. You’ll lose half a point or even a point along the way, but in the end you’ll gain more.’ I promised. But it proved impossible for me to change my way of thinking, which I had worked on for many years. To this day I remember the discomfort I felt when I was playing in that tournament, one of the worst of my career.

One of the most important components of the chess game is the ability to finish it off. Outplaying your opponent doesn't necessarily mean you've stuck the knife in. In the history of chess we can find many wonderful players whose results did not correspond with their enormous natural talent precisely because of the absence of this ability.

In order to prove that you aren't just one of the best but actually the best, the ability to finish off a game is absolutely essential. As Spassky said, 'To become world champion, you have to be something of a barbarian, you must have a well-developed killer instinct.' All the champions, without exception, had this instinct, no matter what their personality or style of play was like. When they reached positions where victory was close, they became aware of the scent of blood and, as a rule, they didn't allow their victims to escape.

It would be wrong to think that Mikhail Tal, who was kind and friendly away from the chess board, did not possess this quality. In chess he was characteristically far from merciful, and he wasn't the nice guy that he seemed to be when he wasn't playing. The expression 'there are no brothers at card games' that Misha would have heard as a child, stayed firmly with him. There are no 'brothers' in chess, either, and if there aren't, it means there is only you, you alone, who must win, because chess is a contest between two people, a struggle between personalities, in which your inner self must triumph.

In this struggle between two egos you sometimes find within yourself a feeling the existence of which you hadn't suspected before. Hans Ree recalls that on one occasion, when he had made a strong move and got up from the board, he began watching his opponent, who was deep in thought. To his surprise, Hans had to admit that his opponent's anxious expression, his condition of nervous worry, his taut, reddening face and the agitated glances that he cast at the clock from time to time, gave him great pleasure. I am sure that this feeling to some degree or other is familiar to every chess player.

Machiavelli advised princes and politicians 'to learn not to be

nice'. Winston Churchill also knew something about achieving goals, when he advised – in jest perhaps? – 'If you want to achieve an aim, don't try to be delicate or nice. Use crude methods. Strike your target on the first try. Come back and hit it again. Then hit it again – with the strongest blow straight from the shoulder.'

These pieces of advice are suitable for chess, too. The experienced professional knows that during a game he must forget about kindness, courtesy and cordiality, and that in sports there must be no place for 'mercy'.

One of Nabokov's characters had eyes that were too kind for a writer; a chess player shouldn't have eyes that are too kind, either. 'A writer should be a son of a bitch', Ezra Pound said, but a chess player should be a 'son of a bitch', too.

In professional tennis it has become a rarity to see the sportsmanship typical for days long gone when the umpire calls, 'out', after which the player favoured by this decision declares that the ball was in fact within the lines and the umpire changes his decision. 'I used to do that', one young tennis player told the journalists, 'but now that I'm playing at the level of Wimbledon and Roland Garros I've stopped the practice – each point is too valuable, and besides, I really can't be sure if my opponent would do the same in that situation.'

Manon Bollegraf, a professional tennis player from Holland, was categorical: 'On the court I shake off all vestiges of civilisation – so that I can act as a real athlete does. I used to bring my habits and manners from everyday life to the court. A mistake! If you really want to achieve something in sports, you should put on blinkers and think only of yourself. Taking others into account, thinking about them, about their feelings and concerns, I get distracted and expend energy and nerves that I need for myself.'

Boris Gulko gives chess lessons to an acquaintance of his from time to time, a doctor, an intelligent elder man who likes music and chess and plays at club level. The man often gets good positions, but he has difficulty finishing off his opponent; there is



nothing in him that rouses the killer instinct. Wanting to help his pupil overcome the deficiencies in his style, Gulko told him once, 'Understand, chess is a game for hooligans.' The doctor heeded the advice of the grandmaster. He began to play extraordinarily aggressively in his subsequent tournaments, and his results improved sharply. This reminds me of the Soviet humorist Mikhail Zoshchenko, who in the days of Stalin's terror said that life had become more simple, more painful, and was not for intellectuals. Perhaps chess is also more simple, more painful, and not for intellectuals.

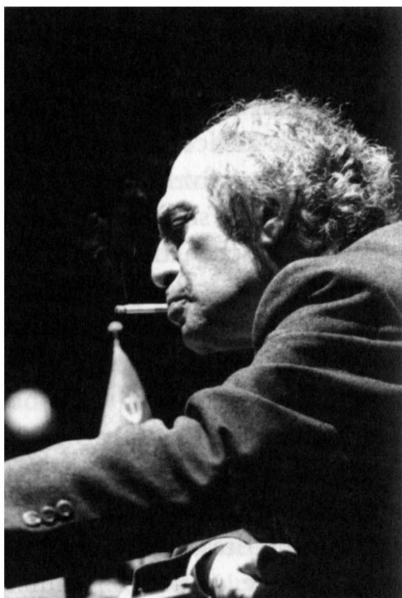
The tournament in Cuba in 1972 turned out to be very unsuccessful for Donner. He spent every evening playing cards and once, because of an incredible hand he was dealt, he managed to achieve the dream of every bridge player – a grand slam. After that, fortune smiled on him at the chess board, too, which Donner considered an even rarer phenomenon. In the game with Miguel Quinteros he landed in a completely hopeless position, in which practically every move by his opponent would lead to victory.

Right at that moment, there was a power failure in the tournament hall and a three-hour break was announced. But this didn't help the Argentine grandmaster, either: having failed to find any of the winning continuations, Quinteros lost one pawn, then another, and in the end he lost the game.

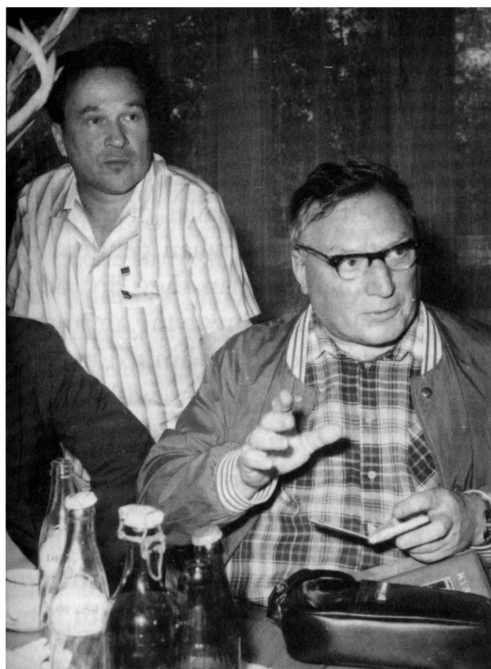
Commenting on this, Donner wrote about his state of mind when he accepted his opponent's resignation: 'I can't resist noting that here I said something that I had never before said after winning a game. Perhaps I had thought about it, but I had never said it. I said: Sorry.'

I had occasion to recall this tale of Donner's during a game against Saeed at a tournament in Amsterdam in 1982. Having obtained a minimal advantage, I tortured the player from the United Arab Emirates for a long time and won a pawn, but the opposite-coloured bishops and the limited amount of material meant that a draw was inevitable. Just then, Saeed missed a mate

Mikhail Tal was kind and friendly away from the chess board, but when playing he was far from merciful.



David Bronstein (left) is playing Tigran Petrosian with, as always, a huge audience. In the spirit of the game, Bronstein showed no mercy when Petrosian put his queen *en prise* in a winning position at the Candidates' tournament in Amsterdam, 1956.



Alexey Suetin (with Ratmir Kholmov in the background) became a respected grandmaster, while Vladimir Zak, who once let him take back a move in an important youth game, never even became a master.

After a three-hour break due to a power failure, Miguel Quinteros ruined a totally winning position against Hein Donner in Cuba, 1972.



on an almost empty board. Noticing this, he tried to take back the move he had already made, but I was on the alert and, announcing mate, I said the same thing that Donner had said a decade earlier: Sorry.

Probably, this internal or verbal apology is the only kind that a professional player can allow himself. But the rules of the game must be observed. Back in the 19th century, when gentlemen's rules played a much more significant role than they do today, Emanuel Schiffers wrote: 'In a serious game, involving an important or financial interest, the civilities should be limited to strict fairness and mutual respect between the players, without any false gestures of magnanimity.'

In the 10th round of the 2003 European Championships there was a game between Malakhov and Azmaiparashvili. Both grandmasters were fighting for the lead, and the encounter had huge sporting significance. In an ending that was favourable to him, Azmai picked up a bishop, intending to make a move with it instead of first exchanging rooks.

Malakhov recalled: 'Seeing that the rooks were still on the board, he said something like, 'Oh, first the exchange, of course', put his bishop back, took my rook, and the game continued. I don't know what should have been done differently in this situation – in Azmaiparashvili's place, some might have resigned immediately, and in my place, some would have demanded that he make a move with his bishop – but I didn't want to ruin the logical development of the duel, so I didn't object when Zurab made a different move: the mistake was obviously nothing to do with chess! When we signed the score sheets, Azmaiparashvili suggested to me that we consider the game a draw. But... by then I had already resigned and it was too late to call it a draw. After the game I was left with an unpleasant after-taste, but that was due mainly to my own play.'

This incident had a big impact. Some people said that in Azmaiparashvili's place they would have resigned the game immediately, as Kortchnoi did in a similar situation playing Bagirov at the Soviet Championship of 1960. In a complicated position,

which many people considered advantageous to Kortchnoi, an exchange took place and the future national champion had to make an obvious bishop move, eliminating the enemy rook on e1. Lost in thought, Kortchnoi impulsively picked up his other bishop and immediately resigned the game.

Many people argued that Malakhov's decision, allowing his opponent to basically take back his move, had nothing in common with fair play, and that Malakhov should not be praised but condemned for breaking the rules of the game. They sensibly pointed out that it wasn't only his own final result that depended on the outcome of the game, but also the standings of the other participants in the event.

As far as I can see, this type of incident is almost never repaid with interest. Moreover, it does considerable psychological damage to the party who shows mercy, weakness or indecisiveness. It leads to discomfort, an unpleasant aftertaste and a burning wound in a disturbed soul, as it contradicts the principles of the game itself.

Mistakes made at the board should be punished, but so should any other 'unchesslike attitudes', as Malakhov characterised them. And who knows, perhaps the results of the Moscow grandmaster after this incident have become less impressive because Caissa doesn't like it when some other goddess than she is worshipped. Caissa doesn't like that. She likes those who enter her kingdom unconditionally and live by her laws. Only after the game can you return to the normal world, getting to know it in the same way that a fish gets to know about water only after it has found itself on dry land.

Robert Fischer has completely departed from the chess world. Distinguished by his irreproachable conduct during a game, from a young age the American strictly obeyed the rules. Playing Wolfgang Unzicker at a tournament in Buenos Aires in 1960, he started fiddling with a pawn that he believed was standing next to the board. Then suddenly he realised it was his h-pawn he was playing with and that both ...h6 and ...h5 would lead to catastro-

phe. The future world champion, who was seventeen years old at the time, could have said, 'J'adoube', as many people would have in his place, especially as other than Unzicker, who was watching from the side, no one else saw it. 'I wouldn't even have protested if Fischer had made a different move', the German grandmaster recalled later. 'But Bobby made a move with the pawn and, of course, he lost the game.'

It is possible that if the American grandmaster hadn't hardened his character from a young age, he wouldn't have managed to become the strongest and most uncompromising player in the world.

The Russian writer Yury Nagibin wrote: 'In the game you must be hard and merciless in the exploitation of any advantage, you must have the ability to get away from nobility and compassion, you must have stamina and even a little crookedness, at least not looking away in the event that your opponent gives you the opportunity to glance at his cards.'

Not everyone likes these qualities, even if they are supposed to be used only in the artificial space of the game. Albert Einstein, for example, said, 'I always dislike the fierce competitive spirit embodied in chess.' The competitive spirit is inherent to any sporting event, and once you decide to participate in it, you must follow all the rules and not neglect any opportunity, even an accidental one.

Accidents almost always play a role in life, too, even if people don't always recognize them. And as long as people play chess, accidents will happen fairly often: when your opponent leaves a piece *en prise*, for instance, a terrible blunder that you must exploit without any pangs of remorse. All this can be seen even at top level, and to willingly spurn such an opportunity contradicts the principles of the game itself. Because if in morals only intent matters, in sports it's only results that receive attention.

A famous case: before the last game of the 1935 World Championship match, Euwe, to whom a draw would have guaranteed the title of champion, told Alekhine: 'Doctor, at any moment I

am agreeable to a draw.’ When after the 40th move the game was supposed to be adjourned in a position where he was two pawns down, Alekhine accepted the Dutchman’s offer. It is generally believed that Euwe played no worse in the rematch that he lost than he did in the first match. Perhaps Caissa had simply deserted him in revenge for his ‘unsporting’ offer two years previously.

Vladimir Grigorievich Zak told how Alexey Suetin, a young candidate master at the time, completely outplayed him in the quarter-final of the Soviet Championship. There were many routes to victory, but Suetin, getting overexcited, lost an exchange and immediately noticed this. Tears welled up in his eyes, and Zak let his opponent take back the move. A few moves later Suetin won with a direct attack. It isn’t surprising that after that Zak never did become a master.

After finishing my game at a tournament in Geneva in 1977, I went up to the table where Ulf Andersson and Roman Dzindzichashvili were playing. Dzin was already two pawns up, and his opponent was also in serious time-trouble. At that moment Dzin blundered a piece and his position immediately became completely hopeless after White’s reply. While he was trying to let the full horror of what had happened sink in, Andersson offered a draw, which, of course, was immediately accepted.

‘I just couldn’t allow myself to win the game’, Ulf said after they had signed the score sheets. Still, regardless of the way the kind Swedish grandmaster was feeling, his decision contradicted the spirit of the game. And how else could Bronstein have acted when he ruthlessly took Petrosian’s queen in the Candidates’ tournament in Amsterdam in 1956 in a position where he had almost been in zugzwang, having moved his knight back and forth for the past dozen moves?

At the Christmas tournament of 2004/05 in Reggio Emilia, Ukrainian Grandmaster Dmitry Komarov, playing an Italian whose rating was significantly lower, obtained a big advantage,

Vladimir Malakhov allowed Zurab Azmaiparashvili to take back a move during the European Championship in 2003. Sportsmanlike or not?



Anatoly Karpov as a World Champion even displayed a fierce will to win in card or pinball games.



but while looking for a forced win he got into time-trouble and his flag fell on the control move. 'Do you want a draw?', he asked his opponent, who a few moves previously couldn't have dreamt of such a result. Hesitatingly, the Italian agreed, although by all the laws of ruthless sportsmanship he should have called the arbiter so that Komarov's defeat could be registered.

Vigour and aggression are the prerogatives of youth. This can be seen not only in sports and not only in human beings. In some coral fish the loud, bright colourings occur only at a very young age. For example, with the advent of maturity the jewel fish and the blue devil fish turn into dull blue-grey fish with a pale yellow tail fin. Even more noteworthy is the fact that these coral fish demonstrate the same correlation between colouring and aggression: in their youth they fiercely defend their territory, but as they get older they become incomparably more calm, gregarious and obliging.

In sports, too, aggression and motivation diminish with age. There are many more days when the desire to play is weak than there were in youth. Professionals in the physical sports have a powerful ally – their physiology, which tells them it's time to leave active sports and forces them to do so. It is more difficult for chess players, as they often labour under the illusion that it's too early to quit and they're still capable. As old age approaches, both talent and memory decline as the mental muscle loses its strength. In chess, old age first of all means the loss of energy and aggression, the nervous system gets exhausted.

The loss of vigour and aggression is very often accompanied by the onset of fear. The fear of stumbling or making a mistake possibly wouldn't be so great if chess players didn't know how ruthlessly their mistakes would be evaluated by others. Losers are branded failures, spiritlessly underlining the fact that they belong to the category of people who cannot count on the affection of the world around them. In the best case they may be pitied.

Hikaru Nakamura won the 2005 US Championship. In an interview that he gave straight after the tournament, aggression was one of the words he used most frequently. 'Yes, I play very

aggressively and always try to win', 'I have an aggressive opening repertoire', 'the desire to win, to be aggressive – that's the mentality I like.' Indeed, in the games of the young champion the first thing that catches one's attention is the colossal energy and aggressive playing style, which is often accompanied by a considerable element of risk. In the end this turned out to be a more important factor in this championship than the positional understanding and the experience of his wiser and significantly older opponents.

The contemporary professional, thinking about a position on the board, acts as decisively as possible. He knows that during the game there should be no place for doubt or compassion, because a thought that isn't put into action costs nothing, but an action that hasn't been thought through is completely worthless.

In the hospital where the Good Soldier Svejk was admitted, a doctor who suspected every patient of malingering prescribed to everyone the same course of medicine: wrapping them in a cold, wet sheet and a strict diet with the compulsory use of aspirin, to make those who were avoiding military service sweat; enough quinine for a horse, so that they didn't think that military service was honey... But the most effective procedure was an enema with soapy water and glycerine. Even the most inveterate fakers recovered and applied to go to the front after this. When it was Svejk's turn, he held out heroically. 'Don't spare me', he encouraged the orderly who was administering the enema to him with a pained expression on his face. 'Remember your oath. Even if your father or brother were lying here, you should give the enema, and that's that. We shall be victorious!'

Everyone who sits down at the chess board should remember the advice of the Good Soldier.

# Genna Adonis

A Dutch chess master who had played in the national championship once or twice and was a calm, composed person in everyday life, sighed one day: 'If someone said, tomorrow you'll win the main grandmaster tournament at Wijk aan Zee, I'd agree to die the day afterwards.' I winced and began to see my companion completely differently than I had seen him throughout our twenty-year acquaintance.

The ancients have written about the desire for glory and recognition. Chrysippus and Diogenes said that there is no more fatal delight than approval from others. Like other philosophers, they argued that for a thinking person, the glory of the whole world is not worth extending even a finger for. They believed that the desire for fame was the most widespread foolishness of all deluded desires. But even those philosophers who despised fame and suggested that it would be difficult to find another prejudice whose vanity could be exposed so clearly by the intellect, were often very reluctant in turning fame and accolades down themselves.

It is very rare for someone who has tasted fame to find the strength to refuse it. Well-known in the United States is the Sherry Stringfield syndrome, named after the actress who left NBC's hospital TV-series ER at the peak of her popularity as Dr. Lewis and began teaching at drama school. She explained her decision thus: 'Fame is destructive and I don't like the way the celebrity factory is organized.' However, by then Sherry was already financially independent. Unlike Wilhelm Steinitz, who said after losing a match to Lasker: 'Fame? I already have fame. What I need now is money.'

In Holland, chess is very popular and after my first successes in tournaments I soon got used to my name appearing regularly in the newspapers and to being mentioned on radio and television. During the traditional January tournament, which the world's

strongest grandmasters always played in, huge pictures of the players were put up directly opposite the station at Beverwijk, and on several occasions when I arrived by train from Amsterdam I was greeted by an enlarged version of myself immersed in thought at the chess board.

All this, of course, tickled my pride, although for me real fame lay not in the mention of my name, but in it being completely ignored. Seeing my name on the list of participants in the main tournament at Wijk aan Zee in 1974, the leadership of the Soviet Chess Federation decided not to send anyone to Holland. The anxious director of the festival informed me of this, but Viktor Kortchnoi, who was still playing under the Soviet flag at the time, called from some foreign tournament and encouragingly advised me to hurry up and start playing in other tournaments, so that they would also be closed to Soviet grandmasters.

For almost the entire period before perestroika my name didn't appear in the Soviet press, and now that Russian émigrés can be found all over the world, it is difficult to imagine how the authorities in those days viewed people who had decided to abandon the socialist fatherland forever. Looking back, I understand that the ban on my name in the country that no longer exists was a very powerful incentive in my chess career and brought me some kind of secret satisfaction that I can't express in words. Now, from being *persona non grata* I have become *personae gratissima* in Russia, but I know very well that what I am now is directly connected to the period when I was unwelcome there.

After moving to the West, I experienced some problems with my name. In Russian there is a name Gennady, Gena for short. When I came to Holland I decided to stick with the latter, short version. But pronounced the Dutch way, Gena sounded like 'Gaina' with a typical Dutch throaty, guttural 'g'. For a couple of years I answered to the name Gaina, until I decided to add another 'n' for firmness and accuracy of pronunciation. Whether with a single or a double 'n', my name was not likely to appear in Russian anyway, in those glorious times in the Soviet Union.

On August 12, 1992, I saw in the newspaper an announcement of the birth of a first child to the Houweling family in Groningen with the name Genna Adonis. I didn't believe my eyes! The explanation came the following day, when I received a letter from the father, a big chess fan, telling me that the boy was named after me. The father knew that the name Gennady, translated from ancient Greek, means 'noble', but what did the name Genna mean in Russian? I got the impression that my prosaic explanation, connected with the peculiarities of pronunciation in Dutch, rather disappointed the father of Genna Adonis.

Reading the letter about the new-born Genna, I was flattered and recalled that when Keres heard that a new-born baby had been named Paul in his honour, he immediately transferred 10 rubles to the parents' account. I wondered if I should follow Keres's example, but not knowing how much money to send, I ended up not giving a present to my namesake after all. Strange as it may seem, there are now two people in the world with the name Genna: myself and a two-fisted boy with flaxen hair in northern Holland.

I gave my first interview in the West in October 1972: at that time anyone who had broken through the Iron Curtain was considered, if not a hero, then at least deserving of media attention. Journalists who wrote down my name phonetically interpreted it in various ways. One made me Genna de Sosonko, another turned me into Gemmna, and one editor who had a copy of an interview with me on his desk understood from the text that I was a woman and built the whole story around that.

In those days I noticed a fairly common approach by interviewers: they extracted the juiciest bits from my replies, put them into their own mouths and had me telling the more prosaic narrative. Looking through the Saturday supplement to one of the national newspapers one day, where my interview took up a full page, I saw that the journalist, who had spoken to me shortly before and had only a very vague concept of chess, had asked, 'Tarrasch said that it isn't enough to be a strong player, you also have to play well. What do you think about that?' He allowed me

to talk some nonsense in a dull tone, after which he casually inserted, 'In 'Cincinnati' Nabokov said that good players don't think long,' again giving me the right to timidly comment on the quote, which had also been stolen from my own answer.

In this clash of minds I was rather like the young hare from the children's book, fishing serenely, while the interviewer was the bear standing behind the hare, removing the entire catch from the bucket. True, unlike the bear in the story, the journalist sorted the fish, throwing the roach and gudgeon back into the hare's bucket and keeping the salmon and beluga for himself.

Hein Donner was very popular in Holland and gave interviews frequently and willingly, but he warned that one should be on one's guard with journalists. Donner warned that women journalists were particularly sharp and wily, and that in contacts with female representatives of the second-oldest profession one should be especially careful. I didn't notice that difference.

Although... one day a sweet female voice, introducing herself on the telephone as a journalist from a daily newspaper that is popular in Holland, told me they were preparing a big article on the topic of 'Sex on the night before a big competition' and that she had already had conversations on this topic with footballers and jockeys (at which the journalist mentioned several very famous names). So what did chess players think about this? The best answer, of course, would have been, 'No comment,' but I'd got involved in the conversation and remarked that unlike other sports, in chess sex was possible not only on the night before a match, but also during the game itself, while one's opponent was thinking about his move.

The interviewer then became quite animated and began quizzing me about my own experience in this field, but I changed my mind, quickly cut the conversation short and hung up. Nevertheless, in the paper that appeared a few days later, one of the garish headlines read: 'Grandmaster Sosonko recommends sex during a game,' and in the photograph, God knows where they found it, for some reason I was sitting with a cat on my knees and smiling meaningfully.

It wasn't entirely without pleasure, though, that I discovered several times that journalists preparing for interviews used information gleaned from previous conversations their colleagues had had with me. There were moments when I'd said the first thing that came into my head, but when it was rewritten into another interview the remarks accumulated new details and turned into generally-accepted facts.

At one tournament in Holland, where Vasily Ivanchuk was playing, journalists asked me about the Ukrainian chess player's strange mannerisms, the way he thought about a move, not looking at the board, but somewhere in the distance, renouncing the chess pieces, as it seemed to the uninitiated. 'You see,' I replied, 'when Vasya was very little, he took the train every day from his village to Lvov for training. It was quite a long journey, about two hours each way, and the boy, addicted to chess, continuously analysed positions and worked out variations in his head. So when he was at the board the chess pieces were particularly superfluous for him, and he's kept this habit ever since.'

This was pure invention on my part, but for the journalists and the public, too, this kind of story was considered much more interesting than the finer points of the Sicilian Defence. After the story had been retold in print again and again, it became a fact in Ivanchuk's biography. 'It's entertaining, but complete rubbish,' the hero of the tale himself commented when he was asked about it a couple of years ago. This declaration passed journalists by, and very recently I saw my explanation of Ivanchuk's habit again in a Spanish chess magazine. That's how history is written.

Fame, such as it is for a chess player, can present itself in surprising shapes. During the Tilburg tournament in 1977 one of the best restaurants in town conceived a special menu of dishes named after the chess players. The menu began with Lobster Karpov with asparagus and various sauces, and also included Pork Chop Hort, cooked in plum brandy and garnished with ham, and a huge bowl of Iceland ice cream with hot chocolate 'Olafsson'

# Genna Adonis

11 augustus 1992, 1.20 uur

Rafaël van Crimpen  
Peter Hoveling  
Vera

kleine vonk van het grote vuur  
thuis geboren op dit aardse uur  
oh vreugdevol moment  
stil afwachting wie je bent

The announcement  
of the birth of the  
'second Genna' in  
Holland.

Ter gelegenheid van het  
INTERPOLIS  
SCHAAKTOERNOOI  
hebben wij onze  
specialiteitenkaart aangepast  
en gerechten gekozen uit de  
landen van de deelnemende  
grootmeesters.



- 1 1/2 Homard "A. Karpov"  
(Sovjet-Unie) f 28,-  
1/2 Verse gekookte kreeft (300 gr) met  
salade-ei-asperges en sausjes. Hierbij  
wordt toast en boter geserveerd.
- 2 Haring Salade "J. Timman"  
(Holland) f 8,50  
Frisse salade gemaakt van reepjes  
selderij-appel-ui-bieslook-mayonaise-  
room-kervel en diverse kruiden. Hierbij  
een malse Hollandse nieuwe haring. Bij  
dit gerecht verse toast en boter.
- 3 Consommé "J. Salachov"  
(Sovjet-Unie) f 7,-  
Stevig getrokken bouillon waarin een  
beetje Vodka-blokjes ham-groenten en  
rauwe ui. Deze soep wordt met een  
croustillon, waarop knoflookboter en kaas,  
gegratineerd.
- 4 Les Jambes de Grenouille  
"G. Sosonko" (Holland) f 11,-  
Zacht gebraden kikkerbilletsjes in een  
pittige met cognac en knoflook afge-  
maakte groene tuinkruidensaus. Hierbij  
wordt vers stokbrood geserveerd.
- 5 Pitze mit Muscheln "R. Hübner"  
(Bondsrepubliek Duitsland) f 8,50  
In de boter gebakken verse champig-  
nons en mosselen in een romige mos-  
terd saus. Hierbij vers stokbrood.
- 6 Sertés Borda "V. Hort"  
(Tsjechooslowakije) f 22,-  
Gebraden varkenscotelet, afgeblust met  
Slivovitz en overgoten met een paprika-  
knoflooksaus waarop een garnituur van  
gebakken reepjes zure augurken en ge-  
kookte ham.
- 7 Podvarak "S. Gligorić"  
(Joegoslavië) f 22,50  
Malse gebraden kippenfilets, welke ge-  
kruid zijn met grove peper - zout en  
knoflook. Deze schotel wordt geser-  
veerd met gestoofde zuurkool, aard-  
appelpuree, gebakken uien en paprika's.
- 8 Steak Haché "U. Andersson"  
(Zweden) f 22,-  
Gehakte biefstuk van de haas welke  
wordt afgeblust met Aquavite, hierbij een  
plakje pâté de Foie, peper-roomsaus,  
groenten en aardappelen.
- 9 Entrecôte "V. Smyslov"  
(Sovjet-Unie) f 24,50  
Even in de roomboter aangebraden len-  
debiefstuk (250 gr.). Hierop een mousse  
van pittige blauwe kaas welke op smaak  
is gebracht met Slivovitz. Hierna wordt  
deze onder de grill gegratineerd. Wij  
serveren hierbij gemengde salade en  
aardappelen.
- 10 Turbotin "L. Kavàlek"  
(Verenigde Staten) f 29,-  
Zeer mals tarbotje (500 gr.) in de roomboter  
gebraden. Dit visje wordt geser-  
veerd met een royaal assortiment van  
gebakken vruchten en pommes frites.
- 11 Bavarois "A. Miles"  
(Groot-Brittannië) f 4,50  
Chocoladebavarois geserveerd op een  
plakje cake welke is besprenkeld met  
Rum.
- 12 Coupe "F. Olafsson" (IJsland) f 6,50  
Verfringde ijscompositie bereid van vanil-  
leijs - witte crème de Cacao - crème de  
Menthe en gemalen coccos.

The Interpolis Menu in  
a Tilburg restaurant in  
1977: Frog's Legs  
Sosonko and Coupe  
Olafsson.



sauce. My 'contribution' was the exotic dish Frog's Legs Sosonko in brandy with mixed spices, the names of which I couldn't find even in a very heavy French dictionary. One day I decided to dine in the restaurant, ordered those frog legs and, for selfish reasons, I must confess, I admitted at the end of the meal that I was the dish. But this didn't achieve the desired effect, except that I had to sign a dozen restaurant cards along with the bill they gave me.

One day a man who was coming towards me on an Amsterdam street stopped, stared directly at me and, questioningly twisting the finger of one hand on his temple, made a gesture with the other hand that was supposed to indicate moving a chess piece. I nodded my head in confirmation and the man, satisfied that his visual memory hadn't failed him, went on his way. Around that time two cats – Donner and Sosonko – lived in the family of an Amsterdam chess fan. Donner died immediately after the death of Hein himself; then again, Sosonko didn't live much longer. It was said that they had completely different personalities.

It is worth noting that a chess player's fame is spread mainly within the circle of people who are capable of appreciating his art, in other words, fans of the game. Indeed, if there were only champions in the chess world, then there wouldn't be anyone to give a fair evaluation of their art. That is why I am very surprised to see how arrogant and scornful famous chess players sometimes are towards fans, the very people who actually know to appreciate their skill and talent.

Fame also has its negative aspects. Sometimes it becomes necessary to enter into a discussion with complete strangers who are hoping to get something from you. About once a year I get a call from the mother of a little girl who plays chess (she is 12 now). They came to Holland from Minsk and have lived in the southern Dutch province Limburg for about eight years. 'Please forgive me,' the mother usually begins, 'but my Lenchka is upset again: she won the provincial championship, but they gave her a tarnished old cup that she's embarrassed to have in her hands.'

Doesn't the famous grandmaster think this is simply discrimination? And couldn't he call the national chess federation and put in a word for a talent who hasn't received the recognition she deserves? This is already the 17th cup, so Lenchka will have something to show her grandchildren when she's a grandmother...' I reply politely but firmly that I don't play chess myself any more, I have no contact with the chess federation and I don't know anything about the junior chess system in the country. This may not be the exact truth, but such a reply, which puts an end to any discussion, is the only appropriate one.

Strangely enough, my moment of glory, even if it only lasted for a day, wasn't connected with chess at all. At the end of 1991 the era of Mikhail Gorbachev ended. On the day when Boris Yeltsin was officially due to enter his residence in the Kremlin, the news department of Dutch television called and asked me to say a few words about Gorby, who was very well liked in the West. My appearance was intended for the eight o'clock evening broadcast, which the whole country usually watches.

'Something very short, about two minutes,' the director told me. 'Later on we have a big programme about the father of perestroika.' I decided to try to use the time allotted to me as well as possible. 'Misha – this is the diminutive Russian name for Mikhail. But people affectionately call the brown bear Misha,' I began in a roundabout way when the cameraman started filming. 'In old Russia on holidays they would bring a bear to the marketplace, stood it on its hind paws facing a large log hanging from a tree and slowly began swinging the log. The log hit the bear, which, naturally, it didn't like, and it hit the log back. The log picked up speed and hit the bear harder, uncomplainingly taking an even harder blow from the unhappy animal. This sequence repeated itself, the bear became more and more incensed, the power of the blows from the log increased, and the people had fun.'

Here I introduced a short pause to give the viewers the chance to visualise this folk tradition. I already knew that if you are counting on success from the public, you mustn't be sparing

with colourful comparisons, and I thought about adding that they taught the bear to stand on its hind paws by putting its front paws on burning coals. I didn't do that, thinking it would distract the listeners from the main subject, and also because in Holland people hate cruelty to animals.

'Six years ago,' I continued, 'the young and energetic General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, Misha, began swinging the log of glasnost, freedom and democracy.' Here I paused again, then said, 'Back then Gorbachev declared: 'My life isn't long enough to bring this sleeping country out of hibernation.'" The cameraman went into a close-up of my face and, looking directly into the camera and narrowing my eyes, I slowly intoned: 'It's been long enough, Mikhail Sergeyevich.'

I wasn't sure that my description of the folk entertainment in Russia corresponded exactly with reality, and I was even less sure about Gorbachev's words, but it was a complete success and the next day strangers in the street who glanced at my face and did a double-take gave me a thumbs up as footballers do when they receive a good pass from a teammate.

It is impossible to avoid mentioning that fame is very often accompanied by vanity. A few months before the 1998 Olympiad I went to Elista with a camera crew from Dutch television, saw everything with my own eyes and found much that I disliked there. I didn't like the portraits of the president of the republic on every intersection; I didn't like the cage in the city centre where drunks who had been picked up from the street by the police the previous night were placed for everyone to see; the construction project known as City Chess didn't inspire great confidence, either, nor did the huge foundation pit on the site where the playing hall was supposed to be built. I decided not to go to that Olympiad. The murder of the woman editor of the only opposition newspaper in the republic two months before the start of the Olympiad sparked a huge debate everywhere, including in Holland, but in the end the chess federation decided to send a team

to Kalmykia after all: ah well, if we only dealt with countries where there were no human rights abuses, there would soon be nowhere left to play...

All these events occurred in the background of a very important medical examination for me, the results of which would give a conclusive answer about the state of my health. On the day when on the front page of one of the biggest Dutch newspapers there was an article that said that in a chess-mad country like Holland only one chess player could be found who had made a conscientious decision, I sat in the doctor's waiting room rereading those flattering lines. Finally the doctor came out of his office and, extending his hand, declared with a smile, 'Congratulations!' I bowed my head, accepting his praise with feigned embarrassment. When we got to his office he led me to a lit lectern on which my X-rays were displayed.

'See for yourself,' the doctor went on, 'the picture is ideal, everything is in perfect order, the results are outstanding. Last week's fears have turned out to be completely groundless. So congratulations again, you're in fine health.' A minute later, as I was leaving the doctor's office, I thought to myself, there they are, vanity and pride. Just yesterday in your gloomy thoughts you tossed and turned all night, pondering life and death, plagued by one thought: what if? But today you forget all that when you're cheered up by a cheap compliment in a newspaper that will be completely forgotten tomorrow, if anyone other than your close friends have paid it any attention at all. The philosopher was surely right, knowing human nature: we'd happily lose even our lives if only they'd talk about us.

And was that September day in Amsterdam really so far from another one in Leningrad in 1957? In a light autumn drizzle, on Vosstaniya Street, there is a group of people standing before the board on which newspapers are pasted for public reading. Although most men are studying *Sovietsky Sport*, there are also readers by the board with *Smena*. Have a look: among the readers of this city paper for young people you may notice a teenager wearing a light overcoat, which in a couple of months because of the de-

scending cold he will start calling a winter coat. The boy is reading a short paragraph about the traditional chess festival in the Palace of Pioneers over and over again, about the simultaneous exhibitions that were given by his former teachers, now famous grandmasters, Kortchnoi and Spassky. Kortchnoi, using the clock on 10 boards against strong first-category players, lost one game and made two draws, and everyone can now read about this. The boy glances at the readers one by one, and when their eyes move in the direction of this chess paragraph, as it seems to him, he wants to shout, 'That's me, the same person you're reading about in the newspaper, who drew with the one and only Kortchnoi! He's standing next to you, here he is!'

A lifetime has passed since that day. Today's tournaments are composed exclusively of people who are young enough to be my grandchildren. There are new heroes on the stage, which is how it should be in chess and in life. Only older people remember my name, although there are exceptions, of course. Quite recently, when I'd tried on a pair of glasses with frames that I liked and asked for them to be kept apart for a few days until I made up my mind, the shop assistant, writing my name down, enquired whether I was related to the famous chess player. When he heard that I in fact was that chess player, the young man was very surprised, as he had thought that Sosonko had died a long time ago. I considered this a bad omen, didn't order my glasses there and never went into that shop again.

I am used to the Latin spelling of my name, and I've seen it in print in Chinese, Hebrew and Indonesian. But the most flattering mention of it was on February 19, 1976, when it appeared in the lonely hearts section of the weekly *Vrij Nederland*, and I have kept this issue of the magazine, yellowing with age, to this day. Here is the short announcement that was printed in very small letters: 'Young woman aged 36 from a good background takes men for a fee. Preferably the Genna Sosonko or Neil Diamond type.' It was implied that the reading public would understand without any explanation whom she had in mind, and seeing my name

next to the name of the American singer whose records filled the windows of all the music shops, I understood: whatever summits I may conquer in chess or any other endeavour, my fame will never reach higher than this peak. Even if after our names in the text of the announcement there was one more sentence: 'Others will not be turned away either.'

# The Stairway of Life

'Your name seems to have disappeared from the sport pages of the paper recently,' said the vendor at a kiosk, with whom I sometimes discuss Ajax's soccer games. When I began explaining, referring to my age, he interrupted vehemently: 'Your age? What's age got to do with this? Chess isn't football, where injuries can ruin your career. All you have to do is sit down and play a bit, look how much experience you've got.'

Outside observers may be under the impression that in chess you can continue playing without losing your abilities, if not into your dotage then at least until ripe old age. This is wrong! The example of Kortchnoi, who still remains afloat by exerting enormous effort, is an exception: other representatives of his generation and the subsequent one have fallen behind long ago. Those few players in their fifties or sixties who still compete in tournaments are a pale shadow of what they were in their youth.

In the past, playing in your declining years was nothing unusual. Philidor, Steinitz, Blackburne, Mieses and Lasker were among the long-lived chess players of yesteryear. Right until the end of his life Legalle remained the second best player in France after Philidor. At the age of 85, in a game with the cavalier Saint-Bris, Legalle came up with a combination that all chess players now know and that has gone down in history under the name Legalle's Mate. It doesn't matter that this combination had a refutation on the fifth move, or that Legalle gave his opponent rook odds. Reshevsky and Najdorf also played chess until old age and Smyslov has only recently given up practical play and switched to composing studies.

At what age should a person whose work demands inspiration and creativity cease to be active? Should you carry on even when your results only remotely resemble what came effortlessly in your youth? Or should you quit voluntarily at the first discern-

ible signs of approaching decline? 'Before a sprightlier age comes tittering on, and shoves you from the stage,' as Alexander Pope once wrote?

This question is quite personal and completely depends on one's goals, ambitions, objectivity, one's ability to do something else, health and a multitude of other factors. Franz Liszt was a brilliant pianist as well as a composer, capable of delighting an audience with his playing. But his career as a pianist didn't last too long. At the age of 36, at the peak of his fame, Liszt stopped performing and never played in public again, completely focusing his attention on composing. Tchaikovsky, on the other hand, wrote music until two years before his death, though in old age he found it very difficult: 'The instrumentation becomes harder and harder to write. Twenty years ago I was going at full pelt without hesitation and everything came out well. Now I've become cowardly and unsure of myself. I sat thinking about two pages for the whole day today – nothing ever turns out exactly the way I want it to.'

Tchaikovsky's exasperation reminds me of what Dr Tarrasch said in old age: 'When I was young I thought that if I showed everything I was capable of, I'd win the game; now, though, it seems that if I show everything I'm capable of, I won't lose.' Grandmaster Lein was even more outspoken when I met him at a Lone Pine tournament in the early eighties. Anatoly Lein, whom I'd known well back in our Leningrad days, looked wonderful, despite being fifty-something: he had given up smoking and as a result of regular visits to the gym he had literally rippling muscles. However, his play wasn't going well at all. 'Can you tell me,' Lein asked me one day, perplexed, during our morning walk, 'why before when I played chess, the ideas popped straight into my head, while now all that's in there is crap?'

In any professional sport a downturn in results is usually connected with serious overburdening or with injuries that prevent the organism from functioning on the previous level. For chess players the loss of motivation and energy, the worn-out nervous



system and the weakening of concentration manifest themselves less noticeably on the outside, often creating the illusion that failure is an accident. Next time will be different, they say, I've still got what it takes, it always worked out before. So the downward shift is often much more painful to acknowledge in chess than in other sports, where the body itself passes sentence because it can't cope with the workload it took on without effort in its youth.

In July 2003 Kasparov claimed that 'my last, far from best results, in my opinion have absolutely nothing to do with my age.' Kasparov was forty years old when he said this. 'The biggest difference between me at twenty and me at forty is in the hair on my head. To be precise, its colour and splendour.' It's difficult to disagree with the latter comment, but the difference, of course, not so much lies in the hair as in what's underneath. Looking back on the path he'd travelled and announcing his retirement from chess, Kasparov had to admit: 'I remember some of the great games I played and that I was very, very excited before the game. I felt that an enormous energy was raging inside me. Unfortunately, this is in the past. It's completely obvious that an older person loses the ability to concentrate.'

When Karpov turned fifty, it was difficult for him to admit that age is an objective factor. 'I don't feel old, I still have enough energy. The only difference between me at thirty and me today is that then I was always in superb form, and now my form is changeable: sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not.' But the changeable form of which Karpov spoke is also a consequence of advancing age.

All chess players who have the courage to face the fact that their successes are behind them regret the loss of motivation, increasing tiredness, problems with concentration, the desire to play safely and to conserve energy. After the age of fifty, Milan Matulovic, who had been one of the most aggressive grandmasters of his day, began closing up the game in the face of the smallest danger, real or imagined: his entire being opposed the force against him during the playing process. Shamkovich com-

plained about the same thing at the end of his life, explaining why he had begun offering draws at an early stage of the game: 'It's not me, it's my brain protesting, saying – give me a rest.'

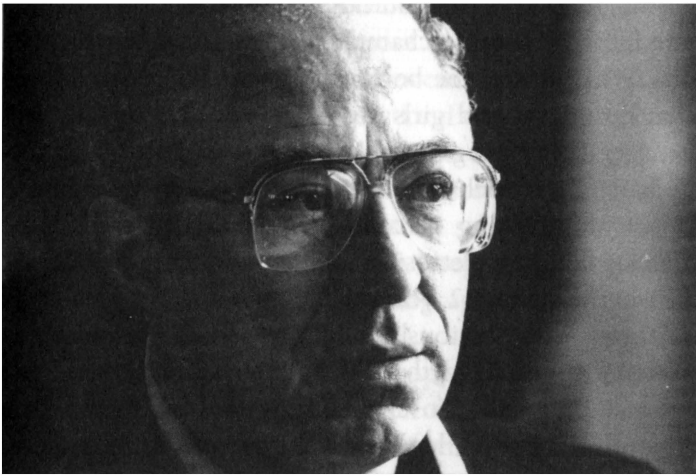
The ability to cope with stressful situations deteriorates, as the case of Yury Averbakh shows. Averbakh was fifty when he played Tseshkovsky in the semi-final of the national championship. 'There is time-trouble in a very sharp position, my flag is about to fall', remembers Averbakh. 'He thinks about his move. I decide to drink some coffee and pick up the thermos flask that's standing next to me on the table. I look at my opponent and see his eyes widening – he is perplexed! It turns out I got hold of the chess clock and I'm trying to unscrew the lid... It was after that particular semi-final that I understood everything: age! No one has ever managed to avoid this and now my turn had come, too. And I decided to quit practical play.'

'Even your way of thinking changes,' believes Boris Gulko. 'You lose confidence, and self-confidence is a characteristic of youth and a very important professional quality. Sometimes during a game a shameful thought comes into your mind: why not offer a draw to conserve more strength? Such thoughts never used to be imaginable before.'

This is an entirely natural process; when you approach the age of fifty everything starts to deteriorate gradually – blood, tissue, eyesight, teeth. Not to mention the chess player's nervous system, which has borne such a heavy load since childhood.

The stairway of life was one of the best-known themes in the Middle Ages. On the left, at its foot, the little baby clambers onto the first step. On the next step is the teenager, next the young man and finally, at the top, the man in his prime. A few more stops and... the grey, crooked old man raises his foot to descend from the last step – into the grave.

If we survey the chess stairway of the past, especially of the century before last, it roughly corresponds with the general age scheme. Noble-looking, bearded Steinitz won the title of world champion at the age of fifty. The philosopher Lasker held on to



Anatoly Lein: 'Before, the ideas popped straight into my head, now all that's in there is crap.'



Yury Averbakh (left), in conversation with Boris Spassky at the Keres Memorial in Tallinn, 2006. Averbakh quit active chess after in time-trouble he tried to unscrew a chess clock instead of his thermos flask.

the title for 27 years. The methodical Botvinnik, who was able to programme himself, became champion at 37. But if we set up a chess stairway like this at the beginning of the 21st century, we can see that little boys and girls are clambering onto it and it's mainly teenagers and young people at the very top, too.

The age barrier at which the chess player feels his energy and ambitions are diminishing is constantly being lowered. Boris Spassky defeated Tigran Petrosian and won the title of world champion when he was 32 years old. Recalling the match that took place three years previously, when he lost to the same opponent, Spassky commented that he was too young at the time and that it was impossible to entrust serious work to a person younger than thirty. Today, looking at the age of the participants in the strongest tournaments, he wouldn't have said that.

At the Wijk aan Zee tournament in 2005, after carrying off a duel with Alexander Morozevich, the outcome of which was decided in mutual time-trouble, Nigel Short confessed, 'I feel completely shattered. Mentally I'm in ruins. There's no doubt that this is a consequence of my age.' Although only forty, Short was the oldest player in that tournament. In the past this would have been the age of maturity, but nowadays it's the age of a veteran; we mustn't forget that Nigel has been playing on a professional level for a quarter of a century already. And here's the opinion – or was it really a joke? – of experienced coach Evgeny Vladimirov: 'Modern chess with its faster time controls can't be recommended for people over thirty, and for those over forty it should be categorically forbidden. For medical and humane reasons.'

Representatives of the new wave themselves understand perfectly how short a chess player's career is compared to what it was in the past. Alexander Grischuk, who turned 21 two months before the start of the Wijk aan Zee tournament, complained that he felt too old to be the youngest participant. Indeed, despite his youth, he has already shouldered some years at the highest level.

To achieve success today, you must work even more intensively than yesterday, piling even more coal into the furnace. It isn't surprising that the combustion occurs much more quickly, too. This process takes place in every kind of sport and chess is no exception. At what age will the little boys and girls who have started playing seriously at the age of five or six and become grandmasters before they'd finished school be considered veterans? The first cloned sheep, Dolly, began showing obvious signs of aging at a comparatively young age – an effect that no one could have foreseen.

The creative, productive life, especially the life of the sportsman on a high level, can't go on forever, and we can't predict what results today's wunderkinds will get at the age of, say, 25 or 30. Will their creative enthusiasm, their love of the game, their desire to prove something again and again and, last but not least, their nervous energy, be preserved? Because in modern chess, as in Lewis Carroll's fictional looking-glass, even to stay in the same place you have to keep running. Otherwise you'll be overtaken by stagnation, regression and death.

When veterans play in open tournaments you can see the sad letter 's' next to their names, signifying that the owner has reached the venerable age of seniority. Of course, the chess player can say that it's only a letter on a piece of paper and he's still young at heart. There are happy people who still feel young well after they've gone grey, but although they can often get away with this in daily life, chess is ruthless, alas, even for those of such blessed nature.

In recent years World and European Senior Championships have been gaining in popularity. Anyone who has reached the sixty-year milestone (or 55 for women) can participate. In reports about such tournaments you can often find complaints from players who are almost eighty or have already crossed this Rubicon: the advantage that they confer on the 'young' (those in their sixties) is too great. There is some sense in this. Eighty, even seventy, is quite different from sixty. Ratmir Kholmov

once remarked that at sixty and even at 65 he didn't feel his age, but playing became much more difficult after the age of seventy. Then, you experience the burden of existence very differently.

Old veterans and young veterans have emerged. And coming up behind them, even younger people! I wouldn't be surprised if in the future different categories of veterans will be established and they will be divided into young seniors and old seniors. Then there will be superseniors, junior-seniors, and eventually – who knows – candidate junior-seniors! In August 2005 in Echternach, Luxembourg, an open tournament 'for young seniors' was held, in which men over fifty and women over forty could play.

Along with the generation of pensioners in chess, another, pre-pension group has established itself recently, the age of whose members starts at around 35-40. Not so long ago, Botvinnik called these the best years for a chess player, the time of the biggest successes. Today people leave the stage at this age, and only a few manage to stay in the vanguard.

I don't play chess any more. Or I almost don't play. You can't take it seriously when someone plays two or three games a year in the national club championship, when I sit down at the board only if the team is in danger of relegation to the second division or, on the contrary, has a glimmer of hope of promotion to the premier league. But even when playing these few games, I already feel a growing nervousness beforehand which intensifies during the process itself, into irritation at the arbiter encroaching on the 'field' of my game, at players talking to each other loudly while their opponents are thinking about their moves, at an opponent who carelessly (and, of course, unintentionally) makes a sharp movement or stirring his coffee with a spoon, at the door to the hall constantly being opened, and at sun rays falling on the board. Finally, at my opponent, when, almost without thinking, he makes a move that I hadn't taken into consideration when I was calculating the variations.

Calculating the variations? Really? Above all, the elder chess player tries to reduce his calculations to a minimum, relying on experience and trying when possible to move intuitively. Unfortunately this is hardly ever enough. And the first to notice this is the player himself. The consequence is self-disgust when you make second-rate moves, often realising this during the game. Checking on the computer almost always arouses additional negative emotions. Even after a game that seemed logical at first glance, you discover how many errors were overlooked, how many possibilities there were that you didn't even suspect during the game and never exploited – and any remaining illusions are definitively shattered.

The tragedy of the chess player lies in the fact that with age, despite giving his all, and despite strict discipline and sincere love of the game, he will have fewer and fewer successes, and the number of failures will increase. But perhaps he can console himself like a Japanese Samurai, who knows well that no matter how many battles he wins and how many prizes he receives, a tragic fate awaits him in the end. And this fate will not be the result of mistakes or bad luck (although these may play a role, too) – the tragedy lies in the very nature of human life. Likewise, the chess player must disdain thoughts of what awaits him in the future and boldly look the present in the eye, simply enjoying an original idea, a beautiful manoeuvre, a new tournament. For the short instant when it is his lot to play a game of chess.

Nabokov claimed that a writer's career comes to an end when he starts being obsessed with questions like: what is art? who needs it? – and so on. A chess player's career comes to an end when he says to himself that besides chess there are lots of other interesting things in the world: so many unread books, unheard symphonies, unseen countries and much more. Because for success in chess, even with the presence of talent and tireless work, you must completely subjugate yourself to the goals you've set yourself and sincerely believe that weakening the position of the enemy king and forcing it to endure a combinational attack, is both

the purpose and the meaning of your entire existence. And this is the main thing, without any whys or wherefores.

No man can be a pure specialist without being in the strict sense an idiot, Bernard Shaw said, and there is certainly some sense in his words, of course. The darling of Holland, one of the most famous footballers of our time, the charismatic Johan Cruyff, once said that over the long years he always took the same book with him on trips, but never managed to get past page 20. When he was asked the title of the book, he couldn't remember it, no matter how hard he tried...

When I read in interviews with the young talents that they've decided to graduate from university to assure themselves of a back-up in case they fail in their chess career, although I respect their decision, I mentally cross their names off the list of top chess players. In any field only the fanatically devoted people can reach the greatest heights. Even an incredible talent turns into a mediocrity without this passionate desire. Greatness springs solely from the rare combination of talent and fanaticism. But subjugating your life to one goal takes its toll. You must sacrifice something else and the question 'what's the right thing to do?' leads to the eternal question about the purpose of life itself.



# Grand Slam

‘Gennady Borisovich, don’t you recognize me?’, I heard in a mysterious whisper. The face of the tall, bearded young man standing next to me really didn’t ring any bells at all. ‘Let’s go out to the foyer, there are too many eyes here,’ the stranger proposed, without turning his head in my direction.

When we left the playing hall of the Thessaloniki Olympiad, the bearded man introduced himself: ‘I’m Ilya Levitin. I flew here especially from America to see Ira.’ It wasn’t surprising that I didn’t recognize him; the last time I had seen the brother of the famous woman chess player was about twenty years previously in the chess club at the Leningrad Palace of Pioneers, when he was just a little boy. In Thessaloniki Ilya was trying to avoid being noticed by anyone, and the conspiracy wasn’t just for show: a meeting with a close relative, especially one from the United States, could threaten Levitina with all kinds of unpleasant things. It was 1984 and there were still seven long years to go before Ira herself would emigrate from the Soviet Union.

Levitina’s father taught her how to play chess. A cult of games ruled the home of the Levitins in Leningrad, and Irina remembers that she was always playing something. Any games – all kinds of card games, dominos, draughts and chess. There were three children in the family – a sister who was two years older than Ira and a brother who was a year-and-a-half younger, and the children made competitions of everything. Their parents let them go out by themselves at an early age, and when Ira went out with her brother, they would immediately make a bet on who could reach a particular place first, using any means of transport. They often went to football games, taking the tram to the terminus, then another half hour on foot to the Kirov stadium. Along the way they passed various attractions, and the children tried them all, once even jumping from a parachute tower. Ira was eleven at the time.

In those days the chess club at the Palace of Pioneers was located in the main building on the Nevsky Prospekt, but theory lessons took place in other premises alongside the draughts club, and in her spare moments Ira enjoyed solving draughts problems. Lively and sociable, a girl who was mature for her age, pleasant and fun, with big black eyes, she looked somewhat like Anne Frank. She loved to play blitz, and during the game her mouth never closed: Ira chatted with everyone around her. To this day, forty years later, from time to time she still pronounces something with the intonation of that long-ago era.

At the age of fifteen she entered adult tournaments for the first time. In one of the first rounds of the Leningrad Championship at the Chigorin Club Ira played Ludmila Vladimirovna Rudenko. Their playing strengths turned out to be unequal: while Levitina was already the national girls' champion and would win the adult Soviet Championship a year later, the former women's world champion was keen on *samizdat* (underground literature), cards and socializing and had never studied chess seriously. Moreover, Rudenko was exactly 50 years older than her opponent.

Irina was playing Black in the Leningrad Variation of the Dutch Defence and obtained a strong attacking position straight out of the opening. At that moment Ludmila Vladimirovna, with a knitted shawl thrown over her shoulders, bearing a striking resemblance to the poet Anna Akhmatova in the last years of her life, began feeling unwell. The clocks were stopped and Rudenko lay down with an ashen face and closed her eyes in a room backstage. I was present as a trainer at the Chigorin Club at the time and immediately called an ambulance.

'What on earth is going on?', Levitina's voice rang out as soon as I put the phone down. 'When do we finish the game?' The doctors arrived quite quickly and after taking Rudenko's blood pressure they rushed her off to hospital. 'Look at the position, Gennady Borisovich,' Irina addressed me again, 'after f4 and gxf4 and ♖h5 Black has a huge attack on the dark squares.' 'But Ira, how can you talk like this', I replied, trying to portray the stark reality for her.

‘Ludmila Vladimirovna might not even be with us any more, she might be gone forever, so who cares about the dark squares?’ Ira insisted: ‘If she doesn’t take, f3 is threatened – how do you defend?’

After leaving school, Irina followed higher education for four years, but she devoted almost all her time to chess. From the age of eighteen Levitina participated directly in the struggle for the World Championship: interzonal tournaments, candidates’ matches and tournaments, and finally the World Championship match itself. Team events, tournaments, then team events again. For several years she was trained by Simeon Furman, but when he met Karpov, the latter insisted that Furman would work only with him. Furman was crazy about Irina and saw a future world champion in her. He was very sorry and concerned that he had to stop working with her.

In the ’70s and ’80s Levitina successfully battled all the representatives of the Georgian chess school, and only the very highest peak eluded her. Although once, in 1984, Levitina got very close to it: in the Candidates’ matches she defeated Gaprindashvili, Alexandria and Semenova one after the other, and led after the first half of her World Championship title match with Maya Chiburdanidze. But she collapsed near the end, losing several games in a row. As a member of the Soviet team, she was the top woman at the Olympiads in 1972, ’74 and ’84, and three times in a row (1978-80) she repeated her first success of 1971 as a winner of the Soviet Championship.

Vasily Byvshev, Semyon Furman and Pavel Kondratiev worked with her at various stages of her career and, although there are other masters who have travelled with Levitina to events, it was these three excellent St.Petersburg trainers who shaped her as a chess player. Levitina’s memory was wonderful and her style was impressive. But her superb qualities of gamesmanship were the most important aspect of her talent. She belongs in the category of people who are born with playing genes; such people can learn any game in half an hour, and the next day give odds in the game they’ve just learnt.

‘Games are easy for me. Any of them. All of them. Not in the sense that I easily learn to play them – anyone can do that. When I say ‘I learn to play them’, I mean successfully, to play with clear superiority, with a real win. The overwhelming majority of people think that playing a game is only about taking part and following the rules. But this way you can only win by accident. Those people are fools. Real players, when they learn a new game, take it apart and examine the nuts and bolts in the very first games, get to know its entire internal workings, and when they start playing properly, they can extract the maximum from any situation that occurs in the game.’ These words of Anatoly Karpov also apply to Irina Levitina.

In the early seventies a new game came into her life, to which she began devoting no less time than she did to chess. The game was bridge. By the mid-seventies Levitina had already earned the reputation of a very strong bridge player. ‘Neither Furman, nor Stein, nor Polugaevsky, nor Karpov, nor I could hold a candle to her,’ Viktor Kortchnoi believes. ‘I think that she was not only stronger than all the Soviet chess players, but also than the foreign ones, as I often watched my colleagues playing at foreign tournaments.’

At one time all chess players also played bridge. Emanuel Lasker often wrote about bridge and even published two books on the subject. One – *Intelligent Card Games* – came out in 1929, and another appeared two years later, titled *The Game of Bridge*. Capablanca was a keen and frequent bridge player, asserting that ‘competitive bridge is a wonderful amusement that generates even more emotion than chess’. In Paris Capablanca sometimes looked in at the Café de la Régence, but he never stopped at the chess tables, preferring bridge, which was usually played on the floor above.

Alekhine also enjoyed bridge. At tournaments, after dinner in the bar or the lobby of the hotel, he often played with partners with whom he had strained relations (but never, of course, with Capablanca). Lev Lyubimov, who met Alekhine in Paris on more than one occasion, attests that the latter wanted to reach the

highest level as a bridge player. Several chess players could be found at the bridge table in Alekhine's Paris flat and sometimes he played in a club or a café.

Paul Keres was another great bridge enthusiast. The 20-year-old Keres won a chess tournament in Tallinn in 1936 easily: nine points out of ten. He was so keen on bridge at the time that against Pruun he got into time-trouble because he'd decided to finish a rubber that he had started during this chess game, no matter what happened.

At foreign tournaments Keres often partnered with Gideon Stahlberg. After the war Miguel Najdorf was the Swedish grandmaster's most common partner. But the pair broke up when their argument over the conclusion of a contract reached such a pitch that for years afterwards, the partners ceased all contact with each other and even the offer of a draw in a chess game had to be transmitted between them by an arbiter.

Until quite recently you could still see Pachman, Larsen, Stein, Uhlmann, Karpov, Kortchnoi, Parma, Hort, Ljubojevic, Miles and many other grandmasters playing bridge. In recent years the popularity of bridge among chess players has decreased sharply. At first it was supplanted by simpler and shorter card games, but now you don't see those at tournaments very often, either.

A touch of bohemianism has been lost to professional chess: following the rules of the game is now no less important than in other sports, and the arrival of the computer with the compulsory replenishment of the databases, analysis of games that are played virtually every day at various spots on the globe, and finally, the constant checking of the memory and correcting of your own, often complex analyses, occupies an enormous amount of time. How, then, can anyone play cards in the evening during a tournament? Well, maybe poker on the internet.

Although in the many centuries of chess history there are numerous famous names who devoted their spare time to bridge (or its predecessor, whist), only one reached the highest level at both games – Alexandre Louis Honoré Le Breton Deschapelles (1780-1847). Deschapelles had a reputation as one of the best

chess players in the world and would agree to play even with the strongest only if he gave them odds of pawn and move. The French master also enjoyed glory as an excellent whist player, earning 30-40,000 francs a year – a fortune in those days. He was the first to employ the manoeuvre in this card game that was named after him (the Deschapelles Attack).

Ignoring book theory, Deschapelles believed that everything anyone needs to know about chess could be learnt in three days, and, comparing the two games, he said, 'chess, in the end, contains only one single idea, which an organised mind can easily grasp. On the other hand, whist is so complicated that it requires many years just to understand how complicated it is.' A participant in many of Napoleon's marches, retiring at the rank of general, Deschapelles lost an arm in one of the battles, but could still play billiards wonderfully, and three months after learning to play draughts he beat the French champion. He was a man of the Game and immortalised his name in both chess and cards, conquering the highest peaks.

A century and a half later Irina Levitina managed to achieve equally remarkable results. After becoming an international grandmaster in both games ('world grandmaster' in bridge), she not only played a match for the world title in chess, but also won the bridge World Championship. Achieving this was immeasurably harder than it had been in France in the first half of the 19th century: chess in those days had been researched significantly less than it has now, and card players didn't endure persecution, unlike in the 1970s, when Irina Levitina began playing bridge.

There was a huge difference between bridge and chess in the Soviet Union. Chess filled playing halls, it was propagandised in every way possible and supported by the state, whereas in the eyes of the authorities bridge was a decadent game, looked upon with suspicion. In 1972 the USSR Sports Committee condemned 'the depraved practice of various competitions, imbued with harmful social tendencies', and the Central Committee of the Communist Party passed a resolution 'on some instances of perversion in the



Irina Levitina in Amsterdam, December 2004. She has made a complete switch from chess to bridge. 'It's difficult to imagine myself ever sitting at the chess board again.'



In 1983, Levitina beat former champion Nona Gaprindashvili (left) in the quarter-finals of the Candidates' matches for the Women's World Championship.



In the semi-final of the same cycle, Levitina beat Nana Alexandria (left).



After beating Semenova in the Candidates' finals, Levitina played a match for the Women's World Championship with Maya Chiburdanidze, losing 8-5.



development of certain types of sport', among which bridge was mentioned along with yoga, body-building, women's football and karate.

It was mainly intellectuals who liked bridge, and although they communicated in the terminology of cards during games, it wasn't difficult to guess that from the arrangement of suits of East and West the conversation could easily move on to a comparison of the political systems in the East and West of geopolitics. Which did happen very often, by the way, and it was no coincidence that among the bridge players of the seventies and eighties there was such a large number of refuseniks. Chess was one of the activities in which Soviet Jews could express themselves without any restrictions, but among bridge players the percentage of Jews was also very high.

Everyone who came into contact with Irina Levitina at that time speaks of a striking personality, bursting with energy and talent. But also a vulnerable one. Obviously unadapted to the system, she had a recklessness that was similar to Tal's. The same went for her absolute otherworldliness and her dismissal of everything material or concrete. 'It was difficult to imagine her at the kitchen stove,' Yury Razuvaev recalls. 'After her wedding I always teased her when I saw her: had she learnt to cook anything other than eggs? Later I was surprised to discover that she looked after her blind mother-in-law and did all the housework, went places and found the things she needed.'

When she was in her best years, winning the national championship several times in a row, after her brother Ilya had emigrated to the United States they took away her stipend and didn't allow her to travel abroad. Not even to tournaments where she had the right to play. She endured it all stoically, creating the impression that it wasn't anything to do with her, but someone else.

Levitina never practised any kind of physical sport, but she loved to watch sporting contests. Any kind. She remembered the names of footballers, hockey players, basketball players, and the results of matches and tournament tables. Once she amazed a

player from the Leningrad football club Zenit by reproducing the entire line-up of the Yerevan club Ararat, including the reserves, and she could name all the American states without hesitation long before she moved there herself.

Mark Tseitlin recalls how he once was Levitina's second at some important event: 'We never prepared for games. Ira preferred to play some kind of complicated game of patience, or a game that was fashionable at the time called Iambus, which she played by herself, writing down the results in a special notebook.'

She has a very analytical mind, and she preserves her independence from conventional attitudes and opinions, although she now lives in a different world, a completely different world.

If you type 'Irina Levitina' into a search engine, you will find 150 mentions of this name on chess sites, all, without exception, relating to the previous century. But there are far more references to this name in bridge publications: the winner of the Olympiad on the US team in Rhodes (1996), in Maastricht (2000), a victory in Montreal (2002) at the World Championship, and at many other tournaments.

Comparing chess and bridge, Donner wrote that bridge is sometimes so appealing that a chess player can give up his own game to play it for a while, but in the end he'll come back to chess again. This didn't happen with Irina Levitina. Her new love, which coexisted peacefully with her old love at first, eventually achieved an undisputed victory. Where was the dividing line that signalled the end of chess in her life? Why did everything turn around? How did it all begin?

'How did it begin? Simeon Abramovich Furman introduced me to bridge in the early seventies. After a couple of hours of working on chess and eating lunch, Furman used to suggest, 'Well, shall we call Mark Arkadievich?' This was a euphemism, as Mark Arkadievich was already waiting for our call. He would come over with a friend, and we immediately got the pack of cards out.

'At that time there were about twenty serious bridge players in Leningrad. We all knew each other and played each other, but only later did we start to travel to tournaments in the Baltic states, where bridge had a semi-official status. There they welcomed us, put us up in hotels and rented a hall to play in. In Estonia a deputy minister was a big bridge player, in Latvia the vice-chancellor of the university, and in Lithuania there was also someone...

'In Leningrad and Moscow we played in people's flats. Later, when I had a place with two large rooms, we could sometimes pack up to thirty people in, although the tables were right up against each other and there was no free space whatsoever. Our home was very open, but there was a rule that before eleven in the morning it was pointless to call, because no one would open the door. But after three o'clock you could come. You weren't a guest, you had to wash the dishes, offer the hostess coffee, and you could take anything from the fridge that you wanted, but you must never forget to bring something with you to the flat.

'Was this an escape from reality? Perhaps, I don't know, but we were simply bridge fanatics. Just imagine what the trips to the Baltics alone cost us. And when you travelled by train, on the top bunk of a carriage? Once the whole group decided to go to a tournament in some small Estonian town. We rented a bus, but as often happened in the Soviet Union, it broke down for some reason and didn't show up. We got to Pskov in about nine hours on a post and freight train, we arrived late at night, and somehow managed to persuade a restaurant to feed us. The waiters served us in the kitchen and we ate standing.'

There were lots of stories like that, but nothing could stop the bridge players. In Leningrad there were times when they got taken to the police station. Once in the late seventies the police arrived in several cars all together and led everyone out one by one in handcuffs. By chance Irina wasn't there, but she could have been. They held everyone in the department for several hours, then let them go. One or two gave up the game after that, but most stayed with it.

‘Around that time other chess players got into bridge’, remembers Levitina. ‘In 1975 during the national team championship in Riga, before the rest day Kortchnoi, Furman, Mark Tseitlin and I decided to play some bridge. ‘Well, a last rubber?’ someone suggested after a couple of hours. That settled it. We got up from the table exactly 24 hours later...

‘There was no literature on bridge at all. If you managed to get hold of a book, you’d read it until it fell apart. During my match with Kozlovskaya I read a book, the second bridge book I’d had in my life, and immediately raised my game several levels higher. ‘When I went to chess events in cities where there were bridge players, everyone would invite me over, as so many of them had been to my place in Petersburg. The fate of many of them was tragic. Some died while I was still living in the Soviet Union, I remember going to funerals in Moscow, Tallinn and Kiev. One of the boys who died young had been my regular partner for several years. He committed suicide in the mid-nineties. Others drank their lives away.

‘I had a special relationship with the Georgian bridge players. I can’t count the number of times I was in Tbilisi, where they always treated me like royalty – the famous Georgian banquets. One of the bridge players, Niko, was a diabetic, and one day they took him to the police station and confiscated the syringe with insulin that he always carried with him. All kinds of things happened. I saw that at the last bridge Olympiad there was a Georgian team playing, and I was happy for them.’

On March 7, 1942, Jose Raul Capablanca left his home at 157 West 57th Street in New York City to play bridge at the Manhattan Chess Club, and never returned. If you walk a couple of hundreds of metres past this house in the direction of Sixth Avenue, at number 135 on the sixth floor you’ll find the bridge club where Irina Levitina works.

She mainly works at club tournaments. ‘Suppose you play as a pair with a third- or fourth-class chess player and take turns mak-

ing moves – that’s club bridge. Every Monday I have one partner, on Tuesdays another, and so on. The session usually lasts from one until four, and occasionally I play in the evenings, too. Perhaps this work isn’t as honourable as winning prizes at chess tournaments, but on the other hand the earnings are more reliable. I don’t have any particular aversion to it, and I often even enjoy the game.’

Friday is her toughest day, when she works as a director for two shifts. The director runs the tournament. She seats everyone and watches everything to ensure the rules are followed, she takes decisions in competitive situations and keeps track of the results on a computer.

‘There are no financial prizes, they play for points. It’s not really clear what they’re playing for, but my partners, especially my female partners, get anxious about it. They’re unbelievably ambitious, even though the average age of the women is about 80. Well, maybe I’m exaggerating, but not much. They often behave like children, so I fulfil the role of a kindergarten teacher. Whenever there is some small crisis, I take a humorous attitude. I turn it all into a joke, then everything calms down again. If anyone had said to me about thirty years ago that my virtues would be patience and restraint, I would have advised them to go see a doctor, but in life everything changes.

‘The positive thing, apart from the financial rewards, is that I do what I want, when I want, and I have no bosses on my back. The owner of the club is an American woman, my best friend. In many ways our relationship is almost like a close, Russian-style friendship.’

Irina Levitina is in a unique position to compare chess and bridge. ‘I don’t think I would admit that chess is more interesting, as you always start with the same set-up. No, if I had the choice again, I’d never have started playing chess, if you consider how much time has to be spent nowadays studying theory, how much you need to know and remember if you add it all up. The game itself, improvisation, plays a subordinate role, a much less significant role today than it did when I started playing. I saw this once



‘A striking personality, bursting with energy and talent. But also a vulnerable one.’



Levitina (centre) in a characteristic pose, analysing with Ketevan Arakhamia (left) and Svetlana Prudnikova (right).

particularly clearly at a tournament in Sochi, before there was even any mention of computers. A game between two grandmasters: 33 moves of theory, and after 40 moves the game was adjourned. It worked out that they had 'played' seven moves, and in that time they had made at least one mistake each, then they had to analyse the adjourned game. Is that really playing?

'You have written about Chepukaitis. Chip wasn't only an incredible blitz player, he was a real chess player. He didn't care what, where, why or how much, the main thing was to play. Chess has gradually lost this quality. Real players want to play, not to laboriously study and analyse openings at home. They can't do this, or they don't want to do it, it's boring for them. Perhaps I understand them better than you do, as I'm one of those types myself.'

When I ask her about blitz, it turns out that she looks at blitz as something entirely different. 'Now blitz, that's another matter, especially when it's not being played at a tournament, but just for its own sake'. she bursts out. 'It's interesting, it's exciting, it's fun! If you lose a game you can get your own back immediately. It's a real game, a game in the literal sense of the word, and you're playing against a specific opponent, trying to exploit more than just their chess weaknesses. That's why I really like the idea of Random Chess, as this could take chess back to its original purpose as a game and you wouldn't have this monstrous opening preparation. But even if people start playing this kind of chess, it's still difficult for me to imagine myself ever sitting at the chess board again...

'Chess isn't really designed for the female nature, and nor is the endless struggle that is characteristic for this sport. For chess you need lots of strong qualities that are found much more rarely in the fairer sex than in men – the desire to play, to constantly prove something, vigour, fervour. Perhaps this is why women are usually weaker players than men. Chess is a very harsh thing and the tragic element of chess is the price of mistakes. You can play wonderfully for several hours, put up a building, but one mistake leads to disaster and the building comes tumbling down.

'These moments create additional nervous tension. Most women just don't have the strength for such psychological feats. Plus, they have more fear of defeat. Anyone who is indifferent to losing won't ever become a first class sportswoman. Also, in chess you play in silence, conversations during the game are forbidden, and you have to keep that up for several hours in a row. I know, I know, this rule is broken all the time, but still. In bridge the whole game is oriented towards conversation. Socializing with and having a feeling for your partner is no less important here than other qualities, and in women this feeling is developed, perhaps even more so than in men.'

In her last years in the Soviet Union she just lived as she had to live, and played bridge. 'When they didn't let me go to the Interzonal tournament in Brazil in 1979 I wasn't disappointed at all. So they said no, that meant there would be more time for bridge. Of course, everyone around me left, and I myself didn't leave earlier because I'm generally slow off the mark, and meanwhile life was going on, as it does, day after day...

'In the last two years before I left the Soviet Union I wouldn't enter any chess tournaments, as I was gradually winding down my career. Many years ago I entered a tournament where Valentina Borisenko was playing. I remember very well how I prepared my friends for games against her; the image of this elderly woman whose position would crumble in the fifth hour of play often appeared before my eyes, and I can still see her clearly today.'

At that time Levitina vowed to herself that she would play until she was 35 and that would be it. She would stop there, no matter how much it would cost her. When she played Judit Polgar at the Olympiad in Thessaloniki in 1988, Judit was 13 years old, and she realized she was almost three times Judit's age. It was their only game, and it ended in a draw. Levitina was sitting there thinking: 'I'm three times the age of this little girl. Three times!'

Irina Levitina was 36 years old when she came to America. 'I didn't have any idea what I would do, but I knew for certain that



I wouldn't play chess. It didn't work out that way. One tournament came up, then another, that's how it went. I won the national championship three times, but I was mainly playing there for the money.

'I played my last game at the Candidates' tournament in Shanghai in '92. If you judge me by my relative position after the age of thirty, that tournament was the best of my life in terms of the level of my game. After that there was a short circuit in the system. I went in for another US Championship, but you can't call that playing: I offered everyone a draw as soon as we were out of the opening, and I'd throw out any old move onto the board. It was completely arbitrary. Random. And anything could and did happen in a game. And I understood that I had to stop. Because these random moves weren't random. Something was malfunctioning. My last tournaments were a real torment for me and I gradually began to hate chess. Now it's obvious that I didn't hate the game itself, I hated myself in it, but at the time I didn't appreciate those subtleties.

'Of course, it's difficult to disagree that energy decreases with age, and it would be silly to deny that the mind ages, too, or we'd still be playing chess at the same level as we used to. But this absolutely doesn't mean that a person can't think. Rather, you don't want to, you get lazy, you just need to muster more effort to force yourself to do anything at all. Most chess players become intellectually and emotionally old at a relatively young age, when their successes and people's respect for them are in the past. But it's difficult to pull yourself out of this bog, the opportunities are severely limited.

'Age is significant in bridge, too, but not as much as in chess. In bridge there is no such thing as a wunderkind and there never can be such a thing. It's not really advisable for very young children to play bridge, and before the age of eighteen no one manages to get to a more or less decent level. That's why you're considered a junior in bridge until the age of 25, and it used to be thirty. Bridge players also usually start to get weaker at a later age than chess players, and not as sharply. I'd estimate it to hap-

pen at about sixty for women and 65 for men. So in bridge, and I mean competitive bridge, you can play for a lot longer than in chess.

In 1997 Irina Levitina and Diana Tulman started a chess school. Diana is a master from Moldova who has studied at the Leningrad Polytechnic. Starting from scratch, the school has gradually grown and now there are lots of students and teachers. 'Diana deals with all the organisational aspects, she's very energetic, I just can't do that. I work there three or four times a week, I have a flexible schedule, I can skip or postpone a lesson any time I like, but I don't take undue advantage of that. I can take a holiday for a week or so and go to a tournament. A bridge tournament, of course.

'At the school I prefer working with children with a rating of around 1000-1200, sometimes with stronger ones, but I like that less, because their parents sometimes interfere, and among them you get some very ambitious ones. In the lessons I feel confident. The little cuties are intelligent, you can see their eyes light up when an idea comes into their head. Thankfully none of them will become chess players, but it's useful for their general development.'

Irina Levitina does not own any chess books, as she has given all her books and her last chess set to the school. She has only kept two notebooks full of games. 'With time my feelings have mellowed, I was too hasty with the word 'hate' in relation to chess, I still feel it, but, fortunately, less and less. But I'm still a long way from reading chess magazines, if I do get one then I throw it into the bin unopened.'

She has adapted quite well to her new environment, but from time to time she thinks back on her life in the Soviet Union. It seems that there, too, her feelings have mellowed. 'In the Soviet Union we were all poor. Money didn't play any role, only swindlers had it, and we judged people by their human qualities and their intellect. We hardly watched any television, except for sports, and all that was left was socializing and conversation. Not conversations about the best place to go on holiday, to Bermuda

or the Bahamas. We were reading and discussing books, and in a more restricted group we talked politics, too. Although I personally was more of a game player than a reader, so to speak.

‘There were abnormal people there, of course. Most were abnormal, but I didn’t only socialize with them. From the age of fifteen I have played in adult events and what I heard there was nothing like what I’d been taught at school. Among the chess players there were quite a few highly intellectual, refined people who would have been doing something else in any normal country. This became particularly noticeable in America. I remember I was playing in some chess club, and I looked around and saw that it was all immigrants, and odd ones, too...

‘It’s great that you defend chess players and say that among them there are no fewer interesting people than among the general public, but perhaps there’s no need to defend chess players for this? I remember very well how indebted I am to chess and to the people I have met in chess. There were drunks, down-and-outs, stool pigeons and ordinary riff-raff among them, but there were also people whom getting to know defined who I am today, how I live, what I think about, who my friends are.’ Levitina maintains that she does not idealize life and is not nostalgic, but says ‘there was something good there that I don’t have here.’

Irina Levitina started smoking at a young age and never liked walking. Instead of going for a walk during a chess tournament in the old Soviet days, she would just open a window. On these occasions she solemnly announced to her second: ‘We’re going for a walk!’, after which she flung the side window open wide, then the main window. A quarter of an hour later there was a new command: ‘The walk is over!’ and she slammed it shut again.

She has not given up smoking entirely. ‘I smoke a little’, she tells me, ‘perhaps a pack a day, but when I sit down at the computer, my automatic reaction is to light a cigarette. I’m completely indifferent to food, but I have one weakness: chocolate. If I have one handy, I can eat a whole box...

'In my first years in America I followed European football, but then I stopped. I realised that if I have no one to share my impressions with, I don't enjoy it. That left ice hockey. I can discuss it because it's an American sport, too. No, I don't have a favourite team, I just like beautiful play. I don't like television much, I read books. I go through phases – I read avidly, five books in a row, then sometimes I don't read anything at all. Which genre? Mysteries, almost always mysteries. In English and in Russian. In English Erle Stanley Gardner and Dick Francis. No, I don't have any problem with the language, recently I've even been thinking in English, and only sometimes in Russian. It's interesting that in the mystery genre there are lots of women writers.

'I've read *Russian Silhouettes* with great interest. It's fantastic that you find the good side even of very unappealing people. I was sad to hear about the death of Gipslis, the permanent captain of the women's team. The most memorable trip, and perhaps the most interesting one of my life was in '74 – to the Olympiad in Colombia. That was the last women's Olympiad, as the subsequent ones were held together with the men's event. Five of us flew there: Nona Gaprindashvili, Nana Alexandria and I, and the trainers Konstantinopolsky and Gipslis. We spent three weeks in Medellin, then a week in Bogota with excursions every day, plus two stops in New York on the way there and back. I had only just turned twenty then...

'Everything was so familiar and stable in the chess world: an orderly system and the world champions were really the strongest chess players of their time, everything was as it should be, and it never occurred to me that it could be otherwise. Then everything turned around completely. It's absurd to us, but young people can't even understand how it's possible to play without a computer. To them we're dinosaurs playing a game that goes by the name of 'chess', but this has little in common with the game they play today. But many years ago we were just the same. I, at least, looked at the so-called old people with the arrogance of youth, and they probably felt the same way that I do now.

‘Every year I go to Europe. My mother, sister and nephew live in Berlin. I like Europe generally, I feel great on the crowded streets there. But there’s nothing connecting me to Russia. The last time I was there was in 1996 and I don’t see myself in that country in the near future. For what? Everyone has already died or emigrated; some to America, some to Germany, some to Israel.

‘Bridge is completely legal in Russia now, anyone can play it, but it’s expensive to travel to tournaments. Although lots of New Russians have appeared, young folk with good brains and pots of money. I’ve met some of them at World Championships and Olympiads. There are all kinds of people among them, there are nice ones and there are unpleasant ones, like everywhere.

‘The Russian women won the 2004 Bridge Olympiad in Turkey. That was their first unexpected and huge success. I’ll honestly admit that I was enthusiastically rooting for them when they played in the final with my Americans.’

In November 2005 in Estoril, Portugal, where sixty years previously Alexander Alekhine had spent his last days, the World Bridge Championship took place. Irina Levitina was one of the American team members.

## Two against One

In a live radio broadcast during the 2005 European Women's Championship in Chisinau, Archpriest Artemy Vladimirov was taken aback by a question from a little girl: was she allowed to play chess? 'Chess?' the archpriest repeated. 'Well, you could..., you could..., to sharpen your wits and develop your intellect.' To which he added: 'By the way, when you're a bit older, perhaps you'll read a novel by the Russian author Nabokov, *The Luzhin Defence*. Unfortunately this writer wasn't particularly devout, but he was very gifted. The novel suggests that any passion can become a vice if you lose your head over it. As the Russian saying goes, a favourite thing may trouble bring. So, as another wise saying has it, everything is good in moderation. My dear mother, for example, plays a game of chess after lunch, then she gets on with other domestic chores...'

It is difficult to say how the little girl responded to the archpriest's advice, but if she had owned a chess book published in Russia in 2004, in the foreword she could have read the words of Archimandrite Alexey: 'The church is not against chess, as, unlike other games of chance that are spiritually destructive to a person, chess brings only pleasant and good things to our lives. Which means that it also strengthens us from a moral point of view.'

Religion has always looked upon games with suspicion, and the attitude of the church towards chess in Western Europe has undergone various modifications, but remains generally negative. The church used to consider chess a gambling game, no different from cards or dice games. Then again, there have also been some chess enthusiasts among the clergy and even certain occupants of the papal throne were not altogether indifferent to the game. Pius V, for instance, was crazy about chess and was so fascinated by the brilliant combinations of Paolo Boi, one of the best players of the 16th century, that he promised him unlimited

privileges if he would enter priesthood. But Boi loved his wandering life too much to accept the pope's proposal, and remained adamant in his decision even when the pope tried to lure him with a cardinal's hat.

A love of the game was also ascribed to John Paul II. Mate-in-two compositions by Karol Wojtyla even appeared in some chess magazines. In actual fact they were the work of a Frenchman who published his own compositions under the names of famous people. As for Karol Wojtyla, in his youth the holy father was indeed keen on sport, but he preferred downhill skiing and football, and in his later years he was a secret Liverpool fan.

In Russia the church initially banned all games. Putting chess in the same category as such forbidden worldly pleasures as dice games, songs, 'devilish tales' and drunkenness, the Orthodox church waged a bitter struggle to eradicate it up until the middle of the 17th century. Regardless of that, chess was very widespread, not only among lay people but also among the clergy, who were subjected to particularly severe punishments for getting hooked on the game.

Although, in accordance with old traditions, the church's instructional literature saw chess as 'the devil's heritage' and compared it with gluttony and drunkenness, among the clergy voices in defence of the game began to be heard. So, at the beginning of the 17th century a certain Father Berinda explained that chess should be interpreted as 'ingenuity', with 'ingenuity' itself meaning the cultivation of the intellect. Despite the fact that a long time has passed since those days, the church still hasn't established a unanimous view on the game, and church figures today hold a wide variety of opinions on the matter.

One of the authorities of the modern Orthodox Church, Deacon Andrey Kurayev, says: 'In the church canons only one sport is censured – chess. Why? There is an aspect to chess which makes it one of the riskiest sports in an ecclesiastical sense. Chess is about developing the intellect. And a person identifies himself by his intellect, far more so than by his legs. If I play football I

can cope with the fact that I don't run as fast as Carl Lewis, for example. But chess... When a person loses, a storm erupts in his soul: is my opponent cleverer than me? I used to play chess and I went in for tournaments. With these kinds of thoughts there is nothing you wouldn't wish on your opponent the night before a game!'

Deacon Kurayev continues: 'In principle, you may have whatever you like, as long as nothing has you. If you can behave normally towards your opponent, maintain friendly relations with him, praise be to God, you are a great person. But look at Kasparov with Kortchnoi and Karpov – they all fell out with each other. Wherever there is chess, you will always find some kind of quarrel and intrigue.'

Religious pastors often appear on various radio and television programmes nowadays. In April 2004 a young resident of the capital of the Urals asked the head of the Ekaterinburg diocese of the Russian Orthodox church, Archbishop Vikenty: 'Is chess a devilish game?' The Orthodox hierarch hurried to dispel her doubts, classifying computer games as 'sinful', while chess, in his opinion, was completely different and the church had no ban on playing it. 'Chess is a quiet, intelligent game that develops one's thinking. It is not a sin', the archbishop declared. 'The holy fathers prohibit the playing of games that arouse passions and excitement, and with them bewilderment, wrath and irritation.' Ah, Your Holiness, if only you knew...

The Orthodox Church also encourages children's tournaments. One such tournament was held at a Sunday school at the Danilov Monastery in Moscow in September 2004, receiving the blessing of none other than the Patriarch of Russia Alexey II. But how does the Orthodox Church at the beginning of the 21st century feel about professional chess, the regular, serious practice of the game? The answer to this question is simple: very negative.

'When sport is taken up professionally it eats up a person's whole life, leaving neither time nor energy for other serious pursuits. Furthermore, it develops the spirit of competition, which means superiority over others, in other words, pride.'



This quote is from the popular newsletter *The Danilov Herald*. Similar opinions can be found in other religious books and pamphlets that are published in Russia today. The desire to do something better than others, to become a champion, is categorically condemned, and the serious, professional practice of sports is considered both foolish and harmful. 'It is incompatible to be a priest and a professional sportsman', the church authorities believe.

In a pamphlet titled 'Do Christians need sport?' the author, a priest called Andrey Ovchinnikov, asserts, 'The accomplishment is not so huge – to score two goals or jump higher than everyone else. Sport is good up to a point, but the time comes when one must find the strength in oneself to give it up, to use the skills one has acquired for more important tasks. Professional sport cheapens the purpose of human existence. Without creating anything of value, athletes often look down on or even ridicule working people. Sport, as a spectacle, as a contest in which the weak lose and are punished and the strong win, expecting awards and honours, is spiritually dangerous.'

Bishop Varnava goes even further and thinks that the spectacle of sporting competitions is unnecessary for Christians: 'Professional sport as a phenomenon has in its deepest essence an anti-Christian leaning. Athletes who wish to achieve great results practise for several hours every day. This work turns into a training process that is many years long, fuelled only by the zeal to achieve great results. The emergence of sport itself was a product of the decline of human intellect. Unlike work, sport doesn't create anything of value, so it doesn't transform a person spiritually. The nurturing in athletes of certain professional qualities, primarily the competitive spirit – you have to be better than the others! – is disastrous for the soul.'

The prayer of the athlete, including the chess player, requesting blessings and success from the Almighty before a game, is indeed different from a prayer with a request to protect the health of a child or for help in your personal life. Praying for your own success, you also desire the defeat and distress of an entirely in-

nocent person. How right the goalkeeper was when, seeing a colleague from the opposing team cross himself three times, he said: 'It's not fair – two against one!'

One of the paragraphs of Article 8 of the Laws of Chess says: 'If a player is unable to use the clock, an assistant, who is acceptable to the arbiter, may be provided by the player to perform this operation. His clock shall be adjusted by the arbiter in an equitable way.' Another paragraph says: 'If a player is unable to keep score, an assistant, who is acceptable to the arbiter, may be provided by the player to write the moves. His clock shall be adjusted by the arbiter in an equitable way.'

Both rules appeared in the Laws of Chess relatively recently and could perplex the unsophisticated reader. What do they mean? What is the meaning of these sentences about a chess player who is unable to use the clock or keep score? Is it about someone who has a problem with his hands? With his sight? Some other kind of problem? In fact both points have a direct connection with religion. This is about observing the rites of Orthodox Judaism.

The Jewish Bible, the Tanakh, talks about games several times, but never in relation to children. This is no accident: the Jewish world was a serious, adult world, while a game or a competition as a cultural concept was characteristic of the Greek world. In the Talmud, in the tractate on marriage, it is said that rich women played chess or played with kittens so as not to go out of their minds from inactivity. Of course, in those days it wasn't the modern form of chess, but a board game that resembled chess.

Although the Jewish religion doesn't permit games of chance and has an extremely negative attitude towards any game that is played for money, from the point of view of contemporary Judaism chess occupies a special place among games. Rabbi Steinzaltz believes that 'chess is different from cards, in which much depends on chance and luck, how the cards fall. This does not correspond with the Jewish picture of the world. There should be no luck, no accidents, victory must be deserved.'



A strict observer of the rules and taboos of Judaic religion, Leonid Yudasin plays on the Shabbat but does not write down the moves.



Samuel Reshevsky turned to Orthodox Judaism after his father had died. He refused to play at all on the Shabbat.

However, he also sees a big difference between 'a game of chess in a café or on a pavement and the World Championship, where the prize fund runs to millions of dollars.' Obviously, here too we are confronted with the notion of professional sport, which could not have been considered in the rules and instructions that developed over thousands of years. But although negative connotations can be discerned in the rabbi's words, Judaism hasn't worked out a unanimous opinion on this issue either.

As we all know, the Jewish creed is very strict about the observance of the Shabbat. Work of any type is forbidden on Saturdays, although the interpretation of this concept is quite subtle and every case is considered individually. Can an Orthodox Jew play chess on the Shabbat? Famously, Samuel Reshevsky played in tournaments on Saturdays before World War II, but he thought the death of his father was punishment for his sins, became Orthodox and started following all the rules of the religion very strictly. Of course, this created inconveniences for organisers, who couldn't all be as accommodating as those at the Lone Pine Open, who managed to arrange two consecutive rest days in the middle of the tournament, on Friday and Saturday, working around Reshevsky's regime.

Smyslov notes that the break on Saturday helped Reshevsky and on the next day, as a rule, he played very successfully and enthusiastically. Kortchnoi, on the other hand, suggests that observance of the Shabbat created certain difficulties for Reshevsky. He recalls the 1960 Buenos Aires tournament, when as Black Reshevsky was gradually outplaying him in the Old Indian Defence, but Friday evening came, the game was adjourned and Reshevsky, nervously looking at the clock and the setting sun, wrote his move down very quickly, after which Kortchnoi managed to draw. 'If only Reshevsky had just thought about the position a little and written down any other move, simply increasing the pressure', Kortchnoi says, 'he would almost certainly have won that game.'

When Leonid Yudasin, who strictly observed all the rules and taboos, asked the rabbis for advice, it was explained to him that

playing chess on a Saturday was not forbidden, but he mustn't write down the moves. Usually when a player is exempted by the arbiter from recording the game score, ten minutes are taken off the time allocated to him for thinking. This is how we should understand the vague sentence in the Laws of Chess: 'His clock shall be adjusted by the arbiter in an equitable way.'

The rules of the religion forbid the use of an electronic clock on a Saturday, and an old-fashioned mechanical clock is recommended. When the foundations of Judaism were laid, electricity hadn't been discovered yet, of course, but according to the modern interpretation of the rules, a person is participating in the process of work by starting up any electrical appliance. I encountered this rule once when I was playing in Jerusalem: on the Shabbat the hotel lift was programmed so that it stopped on every floor, even when I was the only person in it, and before it dispatched me to the 10th floor, I absent-mindedly charged towards the doors nine times in a row and then drew back on each floor...

So how does Islam view chess? The value system in Islam consists of five categories. It is all-embracing in the sense that every human action inevitably falls into one of them. If we exclude the category of actions that the Almighty is indifferent towards, then four categories remain, two of which are rules and two of which are prohibitions. Both the rules and the prohibitions are essential and non-essential; Muslims absolutely must obey the essential rules (there is a punishment for not obeying them, either on earth or after death), but they do not have to obey the non-essential rules (there is no punishment for failing to obey them), although, of course, it is better to adhere to all these rules. For some prohibitions and rules there is no exact definition in the Koran of whether they fall into the essential or non-essential category, and the history of the development of Islamic law is the history of constant arguments about the status of these prohibitions and rules. There is no unanimous opinion about the game of chess, either.

Among the followers of Islam's founder there are various points of view about chess. Ibn Umar considered this pastime worse than *nard* (an ancient Persian game) and Ali called the game risky and unworthy, thinking that chess was played for money. Similar opinions, albeit less categorical, were held by some other scholars.

One of the most influential modern Islamic experts, Yusuf Kardawi, believes that the views of those who have interpreted the laws on chess are contradictory: 'Some consider the game permissible, others think it is undesirable, and a third group thinks it should be forbidden. Those who think this game should be forbidden bring in *hadith* (sayings of Muhammad and his companions) in support of their point of view, but research has established that chess was still unknown at the time of the Prophet's death, so such texts must be considered unreliable.'

From this it is clear that the ban on chess that Ayatollah Khomeini introduced when he came to power in Iran was not in keeping with the Koran's rules, but instead was the personal decision of a fanatical interpreter of them. The same can also be said about one of the most prominent Shiite leaders in Iraq today, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Conversant in Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, French and English, on his website the ayatollah explains to believers that a wife may not leave the house without her husband's permission and that in general it is advisable to avoid any contact with Christians and Jews. In reply to a question about which category chess falls into, *halal* (permitted) or *haraam* (forbidden), the ayatollah was brief: it is absolutely forbidden.

Recently, however, the prevalent attitude to chess in Islam has been to put it into the category of non-essential prohibitions. Moreover, liberal adherents of Islam believe that chess is not only a form of relaxation, but also helps the development of logic. Just as in Judaism and Christianity, they make a distinction between chess and other board games, backgammon, for example, in which much depends on chance and blind luck.

However, for chess to be removed from the prohibited category for Muslims the following conditions must be met: 1. the

game must not distract them from performing a *namaz* (act of worship), 2. chess must not be played for money; and 3. the players must not use abusive or vulgar words during their conversation. If only one of these conditions is not met, the game of chess is considered forbidden.

I have been in chess clubs and cafés in Amsterdam, Moscow, New York, Sao Paulo, Hong Kong and many other cities and I must say that I have never been in one where at least one of these rules was not broken. In the overwhelming majority of cases all three were broken.

# Hein

J.H. Donner (1927-1988)

In the spring of 1943 Max Euwe and his family, who have come from Amsterdam, are staying in a small hotel in Winterswijk. The war is on, but it isn't felt at all in this provincial town in the east of Holland. The former world champion agrees to play a game with an unbelievably thin teenager from The Hague, who has only learned how to play chess eighteen months ago. After lunch they set up the pieces in the back room of the hotel. The players draw lots, as is the custom, with one of them concealing a white and a black pawn in his fists, and the game begins.

The boy plays white and he opens the game as he would begin chess games for the rest of his life, by advancing his queen's pawn. The game score has been preserved: the Slav Defence, a variation that had often been used in the World Championship matches between Alekhine and Euwe. The boy put up stubborn opposition to the former World Champion and only capitulated on the fortieth move, deep in the endgame. It was clear that he had made surprising progress in a year and a half, and the words that Euwe said to his father after the game: 'Your son has obvious chess talent,' weren't mere politeness. The boy's name was Hein Donner.

Johannes Hendrikus Donner was born on July 6, 1927 in The Hague. When he was small his family called him Heini, and when he grew older, Hein. He would get very angry if you called him anything else. 'Remember,' he always said, 'my name is Donner, and to my few friends – Hein; no one ever calls me Jan or Jan Hein, and I don't want anyone to call me that.'

The Donners were very religious Protestants, and going to church regularly was the norm. Life itself in the Donner family was also very strict. His father was a Justice Minister and after the



war he became president of the Supreme Council, a very well-known person in the country, a member of the teetotallers' association and alcohol was absolutely taboo in the Donner household in The Hague.

When Hein was eight years old, he came into the living room and announced to his father: 'People descend from apes, not Adam and Eve. That's simply impossible.' His father was furious. He didn't realise then that this announcement was only the prelude to many difficulties with his youngest son, a lack of understanding between them and long drawn-out discussions that would continue all their lives.

Hein learnt to play chess when he was fourteen – very late by today's standards. Donner's first chess book was *Uncle Jan Teaches His Nephew Chess*, a primer by Euwe for beginners that taught the reader the main principles of chess in an accessible manner. Hein acquired a pocket chess set that he would use during lessons at school, analysing positions and playing through games from newspapers and magazines. This soon produced results: the grades in his report fell sharply. The most lamentable subject was German, although at home this was explained as an act of protest against the occupation of the country.

After the liberation of Holland in 1945, Donner was called up for military service, but he was excused: a lanky youth with a scrawny chest, terribly tall – just under two metres – and weighing 60 kilograms only, he made a pitiful impression.

That same year Hein came to Amsterdam. Those few people who remember him from that time speak of a very quiet, serious young man who appeared at official tournaments in a three-piece suit and tie and replied to all questions courteously and strictly according to etiquette with: 'Yes, sir. No, sir. Absolutely right, sir.' This period lasted for about a year, and gradually he turned into the Donner whose escapades and aphorisms left no one indifferent, the Donner who was remembered by everyone who knew him, including myself.

At first Hein wanted to study medicine, but then, following the family tradition, he chose law after all. He belonged to the

post-war generation of young people in Western Europe who had lost faith not only in the church, but also in the society which had allowed such a monstrous war to happen and which functioned so unjustly. He found himself in the emancipated world of post-war Amsterdam in the late forties and early fifties: not too onerous studies, passions, sleepless nights, endless discussions about everything under the sun and – chess.

Chess occupied a very prominent place in the lifestyle of this young student. Rumours that instead of studying the nuances of Roman law Hein was sitting all day and all night at the chess board playing blitz games in a café reached as far as his parents' home, but to justify himself Hein used the argument that all Donners were masters – in Holland this title is conferred on those who graduate from the law faculty of a university – and he himself was planning on becoming a grandmaster!

He grew up on these endless blitz games, on practical play, and he began finding opening novelties more often, watching what was happening on the neighbouring boards during tournaments. Tournaments? These started later; by the age of nineteen he had played in one serious tournament only – the Wijk aan Zee Hoogoven Tournament, in the third group, and he finished somewhere in the middle of the tournament table.

The following year at Wijk aan Zee he was already playing in the reserve masters' group, in which all the young and most promising Dutch chess players took part. Nine out of nine! What he himself thought of this result is self-evident.

Donner achieved his first big success in 1950. The main Hoogoven Tournament finished sensationally: it was won by a young debutante, the first board of the second team of the long-established DD club in The Hague – Hein Donner. Most surprising was the fact that before the tournament began Donner, who had not had any such significant results previously, was completely confident of his success. These qualities – optimism and self-confidence, often translating into bravado, already distinguished Donner sharply from other Dutch chess players of the

time. In that tournament Donner for the first time outstripped Max Euwe, who stood in those years at the unattainable summit of the Dutch chess world.

Now Donner loudly proclaimed himself the first professional chess player in Holland, but, as a professional, he earned very little. Tournament prizes weren't very big and you couldn't always count on winning them. His earnings came from simultaneous exhibitions and columns in newspapers and magazines. At that time nobody dreamt about becoming a professional, and even Euwe would sometimes play in a tournament where he received a set of silver spoons as a prize.

Despite the fact that Donner called himself a professional, in his approach to the game, his preparation for tournaments, if there was any at all, he remained a typical amateur. Some have even claimed that there was a period when he didn't have a chess set at home. A quarter of a century later, during the Nice Olympiad, Donner went over to a rack of chess books and, seeing the *Chess Informant*, began flicking through it. 'Interesting,' he said, 'now here's a book where you can find all the current games, arranged by openings. You can look up your opponent's games, or a variation you're interested in. It's amazing!' The Yugoslavs had been publishing *Chess Informant* for eight years already...

The national chess federation saw him as a black sheep. He didn't receive a dime for playing in the Olympiads; as he was a professional, in the eyes of officials he didn't work anywhere, while the other team members were teachers, engineers or office workers, and they got compensation for their lack of income.

Donner became a grandmaster in 1959, when in the whole world there were only 57 bearers of the highest title, of whom twenty lived in the Soviet Union. There were only eight grandmasters in Western Europe, so he always received plenty of invitations to tournaments. In those years he played a lot. The year 1963 was one of the peaks of his career. Donner won the strong Hoogoven Tournament, ahead of Averbakh, Bronstein and eight other grandmasters. 'Of course,' second-placed Bronstein said at

the time, 'If Donner is in the mood and wants to play, he can play very well.' In that period Donner won the Dutch Championship three times, regularly and successfully appeared in strong tournaments at Wijk aan Zee, Amsterdam, Munich, Dublin and Ostend, and won first board at the European Championships in Hamburg. But there were also setbacks and even failures, as in 1966 when he came last at the Piatigorsky Cup in Santa Monica, where the world's strongest grandmasters played.

The ruthless statistics show that out of the 129 games that Donner played against Soviet chess players he lost 54, drew 72 and won only three – against Smyslov, Spassky and Gipslis. It's hardly surprising that Donner never played in any tournaments in the Soviet Union. When he analysed his games with Soviet players, something which I have witnessed more than once, he resembled a modest pupil, understanding, without doubt, the entire difference in the reservoir of knowledge and preparation between himself and his opponents. He tried to camouflage this with humour and when he was preparing for games with Soviet grandmasters he would start bemoaning with his characteristic intonations: 'Smyslov? If he plays a6 in the Spanish, my bishop goes down. Botvinnik? When he pins my knight with his bishop on g4, I'm already done for, and I'll lose my queen in the end.'

The sixties were the years of student demonstrations, unrest and riots all over Europe. The Provo movement came up in Amsterdam. Its name was derived from the first two syllables of the word 'provoke' and that was precisely how it was perceived by the authorities. The participants in this movement were left-wing intellectuals, non-conformists, students and merely young people, who always have been and always will be ready to revolt just for the sake of a revolt. The Provo's were a movement aimed against the establishment, law and order, against the manners which were considered the only decent way of doing things, and for freedom of fashion, long hair, and social justice, or at least for what the supporters of this movement understood by this term.

Donner's first wife, Irene van de Wetering, played a prominent role in this movement. Although Hein would say at the time: 'This is nothing to do with me, like Eva Braun, I stand apart from all of it,' he and his friend Harry Mulisch, who was already a famous Dutch writer then, did take part actively in the Provo movement. In 1966, when Donner's wife was arrested during one of the demonstrations, Hein made a public statement that as a sign of protest he would refuse to play in the Olympiad for a country where a woman could be arrested and held in the police station for several hours while her two little children were waiting for her at home. Reports about the anarchy in Amsterdam and the 'courageous decision of grandmaster Donner' appeared in chess publications and even in ordinary periodicals in the Soviet Union.

These times in Western Europe coincided with the Prague Spring and when Donner found himself in Prague he reported for the weekly *Vrij Nederland* (Free Holland) directly from the scene of events, meeting dissidents and approving passive resistance to the Soviet tanks.

In 1967 Donner won a tournament in Venice, ahead of the reigning World Champion Petrosian and several other grandmasters. The victor himself reacted more than philosophically to his success. 'Winning such a tournament, ladies and gentlemen, happens by itself. Chess will always be a game of chance,' Donner wrote. This theme can often be found in his writing: 'Winning a game by sheer luck brings much more internal satisfaction than a victory brought about by the consequences of your play,' he said more than once.

Donner's triumph in Venice had a completely unexpected sequel. The municipal administration, which was dominated by communists, anticipating a certain victory for Petrosian, had introduced a special prize along with the usual ones: a golden gondola with 24 diamonds. On his return to Holland, Donner unexpectedly said on live television: 'I will donate this prize to the Red Cross in Vietnam. Personally I won't be opposed if they buy arms with their aid money, as the Americans have no right

to be in Vietnam.’ This impulsive statement was probably a reaction by Donner to the TV station’s ban, prior to the interview with him, on discussing the explosive topic of Vietnam. The Vietnam War was at its height then and although anti-American demonstrations were raging in all the European capitals, and Donner and his friend Mulisch had also been out to the US consulate in Amsterdam with home-made placards, this statement by the grandmaster elicited a stern reaction.

Donner’s column in the magazine *Elsevier* was immediately dropped for his attacks on a country that was allied with Holland. The editor of another magazine that Donner worked for, *De Tijd* (Time), wanted to do the same, and only the intercession of his journalist colleagues saved him from such a decisive measure. Here it is worth pointing out that the municipality of Venice had second thoughts and in the end never did send the gondola with the diamonds to Holland.

At international tournaments in the fifties Donner met Ludek Pachman, who was a loyal communist at the time, and after their discussions Donner said: ‘I will never set foot in the communist countries.’ This was his stance until Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba. In the sixties and seventies the word Cuba set left-wing hearts in Western Europe on fire. For those who were disappointed with Soviet-style socialism another model had appeared, ‘real’ socialism.

When Donner played in Cuba for the first time in 1964, Che Guevara, a big chess fan, often came to the tournament, and Donner recalled later that he once played with Che, and even remembered the opening – a Caro-Kann – but as he wrote: ‘Despite my best efforts, I haven’t been able to reconstruct the rest of the game.’

Tens of thousands of rapturous admirers dreamt of visiting the ‘Island of Freedom’ and many of them did go to Cuba, because Fidel Castro was a ‘good communist’, so Cuba was sacred, and Western intellectuals had to defend the island, build new houses and chop sugarcane. Harry Mulisch and Hein Donner also fell under the spell of ‘communism with a smile’ and were fascinated

by the charming and charismatic Cuban leader. But, in contrast to Mulisch, who claimed that in Cuba even the animals were more beautiful and the bird-song clearer than in the other Latin American countries, Donner quickly saw that everything in the country was rotten and on the verge of falling apart. But that was precisely why it was necessary to help.

True, the work of the two of them, with machetes in their hands, of which photographs were published, didn't last long; the friends spent nearly all their time in the swimming pool of the Hotel National discussing the fate of the Cuban revolution with their fellow-travellers.

For many people in Holland, and particularly the Soviet Union, Donner's participation in demonstrations about Cuba or Vietnam was enough to declare him a communist; for others he was an anarchist, which is closer to the truth. Kortchnoi, who called him a 'left-wing socialist', recalls how Donner, angry at the behaviour of the Dutch government at the time of the Provo movement, wanted to claim political asylum in the United States, and he was perplexed by this, as this was a country whose policies Donner had publicly opposed on more than one occasion. The professor and chess master Johan Barendregt called Donner a fascist, although at the same time adding that he was the nicest fascist he'd ever met. And he explained that he was referring to Donner's style of discussion, when he raised his voice by several decibels, trying to convince his interlocutor of his own opinions.

So who was he, really? I think that if you could give Donner any kind of label, he was probably an anti-anti-communist. He didn't like people who by inclination and upbringing he ought to have considered his peers, but who didn't think much about the methods of smashing communism, arguing that in the struggle with this evil any methods were good. 'Everything that is bad for the reds is good for me,' Nabokov said, but Donner couldn't share that opinion. He rated Orwell very highly, but there is no doubt that he wouldn't have liked the fact that the writer gave a list of communist propagandists with the names of Chaplin, Redgrave, Priestley and 35 other cultural figures on it to the Brit-

ish intelligence service. Donner attached great significance to moral principles – an attitude that is hardly compatible with the reality of politics, no matter what hue. In him there was a combination of Protestantism and left-wing ideas and ideals – not such a rare combination – the consequence of his upbringing in The Hague and his student years in Amsterdam.

I first saw Donner a few days after my arrival in Holland in October 1972. From the television screen the faces of two grandmasters that I recognized from photographs were looking at me – Donner and Pachman. The active participant in the Prague Spring, who had spent some time in prison and then been given permission to leave the country, had stopped in Holland on his way to Germany. At the time I couldn't follow the details of the political debate that had flared up between the grandmasters, but it was clear that Pachman was accusing his opponent of left-wing sympathies and Donner was reminding Pachman of his own, very active membership in the Communist Party, and seriously doubting his sudden conversion to Catholicism and dissidence.

In 1973 I played several tournament and training games with Donner and we got to know each other better. That same year I moved to Amsterdam and also became a member of De Kring – a club in the centre near the Leidseplein, the members of which tended to be people of 'free professions' – actors, artists, journalists, musicians and chess players. I needed several recommendations to join the club, and one of them came from Donner.

Donner and I often travelled Holland, giving simultaneous exhibitions together in all the different towns and villages of the small country. We almost always went by train, but a couple of times we drove in my Morris Minor. Donner didn't drive on principle. 'I'm not a chauffeur, I don't sit behind the wheel,' he insisted more than once.

We usually met at Amsterdam's Central Station; it was difficult to miss him with his height of almost two metres. Hein would bring with him a bundle of newspapers and magazines and leave them on the train after he'd read them. Besides Dutch newspa-



pers, he read dailies in German and English. I think the amount he spent on these was about half the cost of his quite shabby, but formerly good quality boots, which he always wore, but this didn't interest him at all.

He was a man of soul, and he openly ignored his own body. 'You could wear gloves, Hein,' his friend Harry Mulisch once remarked, looking with pity at his hands, which were turning blue outside from the sudden onset of a February frost. Hein, who was just discussing the philosophy of Heidegger, interrupted his monologue; he didn't immediately understand the meaning of the words, but the expression on his face was difficult to mistake: how could you think about such trivia?

In me he found an appreciative listener who wasn't afraid to ask questions about the history of Holland, Dutch literature, and many, many other subjects that I didn't know about. He particularly enjoyed explaining the nuances of the Dutch language to me.

He would answer my questions patiently and with pleasure, because this was his role. 'It's not in my character to listen to others, I'm used to talking myself,' he often repeated. And to some extent it's thanks to him that in those years, which I spent by his side, I didn't so much become Dutch, but more an 'Amsterdamer', which isn't the same thing at all. 'Praise the Lord, we live not in Holland, but in Amsterdam,' Donner would say. Once I told him how my mother had taught me to play chess, and when a couple of times I persistently tried to move my king to a square that was controlled by an enemy piece, my mother, laughing, explained that this was against the rules of the game. 'Aha!' Hein interjected joyfully, and immediately interpreted my story from a Freudian point of view, not forgetting, of course, about the Oedipus complex.

After an exhibition was over Donner would want to get home to Amsterdam as quickly as possible, but we observed the decencies and in the car taking us to the station Donner, trying to keep a conversation going with the local chess players, would often ask politely: 'How many members are there in your club?' And

whatever the reply, he would remark, looking straight ahead, through the windscreen: 'Hm, hm... Forty-four – not bad, it's all right, not bad.' Or, after asking a completely ridiculous question about which day of the week the club met, he would pause, and shaking his head in approval, say: 'Friday – well, well' or 'Thursday – excellent, excellent.'

Sometimes the exhibition dragged on and we had to spend the night in a hotel. Hans Ree recalls one such event: 'After a simultaneous exhibition in a small town somewhere in the north of the country, Donner and I and some other chess players were sitting in a local café, and the conversation went on until long after midnight. The owner of the establishment, summoning up courage, told Donner that for him personally it was a great honour to receive guests from the capital, but there would be trouble if the police saw the café open after midnight. 'We'll sort this out right away,' Donner promised. 'Do you have a phone book?'

Dialling the number of the mayor, Donner introduced himself and asked the leader of the town to give an instruction to his subordinates that they should make an exception for this evening. 'Mr Donner,' the mayor answered, 'it's very nice to know you, as I used to be acquainted with your father, but he would never have allowed himself to call someone at two in the morning, especially not with such a question,' in reply to which Hein had to agree that indeed, his father would never have done that.

Donner smoked relentlessly, several packets a day, always Chesterfields; during a game the ashtray next to him on the table would quickly fill up with cigarette butts and the boys on the demonstration boards had to empty them a few times. On entering De Kring he would first feel in the pockets of his jacket and trousers: one, two, three, four, making sure there were four packets of cigarettes, the supplies for the evening – that he was stocked up. No evening would pass, naturally, without a drink, and he could drink a great deal, most often rum and Coke; there were periods in his life when he consumed enormous quantities of these, but sometimes he gave himself a break and drank only milk.



Above: 'Did you read Solzhenitsyn's letter in the paper this morning?', Hein Donner asked Genna Sosonko before making his first move in an exhibition game in Eindhoven, 1973.



Left: Donner as everyone knew him: smoking Chesterfields at the board. His ashtrays had to be emptied more than once during a game.



At a training camp in Apeldoorn, before the 1976 Haifa Olympiad. Above, left to right: Hans Ree, Hans Böhm, Gert Ligterink, Hein Donner, Rob Hartoch, Viktor Kortchnoi. Below: masseuse, Jan Timman, Hans Bouwmeester and Genna Sosonko. Donner: 'I can't stand football. The only kind of sport I like is conversation.'



Donner immersed in thought during an important match at the Luzern Olympiad, 1982, not long before his stroke.

Once we had to play a game with human pieces in the city of Leeuwarden. 'Can you find something suitable?' Donner asked me the day before. In general, these kinds of games are hardly ever actually played, and they end in a draw after beautiful sacrifices and mass exchanges. I decided on one of the lesser-known games between Alekhine and Bernstein, and Hein told me that he remembered it all perfectly well, after casting a glance at it on the train.

When it was time for the game we set ourselves up in towers facing each other, and play began. For a while everything went according to the prepared scenario. But just before the combination which would lead to the disappearance of all the rooks and pawns which had been languishing with nothing to do, quietly talking to each other, Donner began thinking in earnest, and when my eyes met his completely desperate face, it became clear to me that he had forgotten the game. He went a completely different way, and a suspicion even crept into my mind that he might possibly have begun playing for a win, but everything worked out and the game ended in a draw another way. In the confusion that reigned on the board, none of the spectators noticed that first he, and then I, had ignored a forced win.

'I played better than Bernstein and it all turned out much more effectively,' Donner said when we were sitting in the carriage of the train taking us back to Amsterdam. 'I have known Bernstein and Tartakower. I was with Tartakower in Paris in 1947. He was living in a little hotel and his room was quite unpresentable. He himself was rather downtrodden and unkempt, but even then I didn't give a second thought to the fate of the chess professional, as I was twenty years old, and you yourself know what 20-year-olds think about.'

He had met many chess players of the pre-war generation: Bogoljubow, Bernstein, Tartakower and Sämisch, and had played some of them. Once he told me how the Spanish grandmaster Arturo Pomar had ended his career. Playing a game in some tournament in Ireland, Pomar found a 'black hole' on the square a6. He sent all his pieces to this square, where they were destroyed

by the enemy one after another. The Spanish grandmaster was taken to hospital in an ambulance, and he never played chess again.

Donner never went to the Soviet Union and we often talked about this country which no longer exists. He liked my tales about the communal flat where I had grown up, the neighbours, one bathroom for 30 people, with a timetable showing the names of the residents next to the days of the week when it was their turn to use it, and he liked the subjects of the debates we had in the kitchen of the communal flat. But the biggest impression on him was made by my story about how at the end of 1965, at the very beginning of my military service before I was sent to a sports unit, I had worked with boxers, gymnasts and cyclists near Vyborg, on the way to Finland, building a canal. 'It got to 40 below at times, and the men's streams of urine didn't even hit the ground as they turned into icicles,' I concluded my story in the spirit of Hein himself, mixing reality with fantasy.

'Leave Genna alone,' Donner would often say after this at team meetings, when I complained of feeling unwell, 'when he was in the Soviet Union the poor chap had to piss outside when it was 40 below.' From inexperience I protested at first, but I soon gave up this pointless effort, reconciling myself with something Donner had said to a friend in a similar situation: 'You must agree that my treatment of this story is much more effective.'

During the 1974 Nice Olympiad Donner was sitting in a café with Timman and the waitress smiled a few times at the handsome young Dutchman with his mysterious face and hair down to his shoulders. At dinner the next day Donner described the event this way: 'Yesterday Jan and I were in a brothel. I told the girls that Jan was my son and that he had absolutely no experience... And what do you know? The chicks got into a right brawl, no one wanted to let anyone else have him. Of course, Jan didn't blunder here...'

At the same Olympiad in 1974 I played for the national team for the first time. Donner declared then that with the arrival of Sosonko in Dutch chess a true professional had appeared for the

first time: if previously everyone had been eager for a fight and all six members of the team were hoping to be included in the four vacant places on the playing sheet, now, when the captain posed the traditional question at team meetings about which one of them would like to rest the next day, Genna, without letting him finish the sentence, would say he had nothing against it.

In Nice the Dutch team lost 1-3 in the first round of the semi-final to a weak Austrian team. Only I managed a win, and Donner said at dinner: 'I'm sorry that you have come to such a useless country.' But Holland nevertheless made it to the final and ended up in fifth place. 'If we'd been more successful against Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, we could have got even further,' I began fantasising. 'Remember,' Donner told me, 'from a state where bronze medals are considered a failure, you've come to a country where fifth place in the final is a big success, and this doesn't only apply to chess, you should put it in your pipe and smoke it, and rethink your mentality.'

One of his favourite topics of conversation was politics, but, of course, he didn't belong to any party, because the membership of a party implies first of all party discipline, and for him the freedom of the individual came before all. After the Labour Party, which he sympathised with, won a majority in parliament for the first time, Donner asked someone: 'Aren't you ashamed to vote for the biggest party?'

Another time he began questioning me about the mass arrests and deportations of whole sections of the population in the Soviet Union in the thirties, and, nodding his head with satisfaction, gave me a lecture in which he drew a parallel between these acts and Nimzowitsch's theory of prophylaxis in chess, the general tendency towards defence in those years. I listened to him and thought: 'My past is a past more past'. I understood that people in the free world didn't understand and couldn't understand fully those who had lived through that time in the Eastern European countries, as only by living within that isolated space could you grasp the entire extent of the repression there. So when he started talking about politics, I did not give him any quarter; like

everyone who grew up in the Soviet Union, tolerance wasn't my strongest quality.

'It would be good for you, Hein, to go away for a couple of months – you don't need more – to a typical camp in the Soviet Union,' I told him, 'with a couple of vigorous interrogations by the KGB, it wouldn't do you any harm.' He replied: 'I would behave like the hero of a book that I read recently. When they beat him during an interrogation, he immediately said: 'Don't you dare hit me in the face, I'm British, I'll sign anything you want.' By the way, have you read anything by Kurt Tucholsky?' 'Who is that, Hein?' 'Oh, God! Get this barbarian away from me, this person doesn't know who Kurt Tucholsky is!'

One day when Donner lifted his eyes from his book he noticed in the next compartment of the train a brown-and-white collie lying elegantly next to its owner, and he cast a suspicious glance at the dog. Knitting his brows, he thrust his hand into his pocket for a cigarette, and I knew he was about to tell a story. 'You don't know, of course, but in the family coat of arms of the very long line of Donners there is an image of two dogs climbing a mountain. This looks strange, because the Donners are innately frightened of dogs, especially the male side. We never had any dogs in our family and, as far as I know, none of our ancestors had them either. Or rather: this concerns the part of the family who preferred in their time to remain in our stupid old Europe. But when the poorest branch emigrated to America, things took quite a different turn.

'Experts in American folklore will know the story of the Donner Pass. In 1846, at the beginning of the big migration to the West, part of the caravan of covered wagons carrying the pioneers got stuck near Death Valley on the southern spurs of the Rocky Mountains at a pass that was later named Donner. Several families had to spend the winter months there in inhuman conditions, among the snowdrifts. This isn't your occasional piss at 40 below.

'Early in the spring it became clear that only the Donners had survived this winter. They were able to continue their journey, and eventually they reached California and were very successful



there. But then strange rumours began to spread, never, by the way, denied by my family and later confirmed by specialist research, that my ancestors had only remained alive because they had eaten their comrades in misfortune. First they boiled a fatty soup from the bodies of those who had died a natural death, then, having acquired a taste for it, they moved on to those living colleagues in the winter camp who looked more or less appetising.'

I shuddered. 'The details haven't been preserved,' and here Hein smiled lustfully, 'but you yourself understand that they didn't step into the cooking pot voluntarily. They say the dogs were eaten too. Many years later one of the friends of Frederick Donner described my distant relative thus: 'A huge, very approachable man who was friendly to everyone, but I wouldn't have wanted to be on my own with him with bare calves, in case he got hungry...' By the way, did you know the dog belonging to Berry Withuis that was nicknamed FIDE? Once when I was playing a match with Gligoric in some godforsaken place here in Holland, I spent ten days in a row in the company of Gligoric, the arbiter of our match, Withuis, who kept in contact with the outside world, and Withuis's dog, FIDE.

'Usually the animal lay peacefully under the table, but if I began to talk loudly or laugh, FIDE would come up to me, put his paw on my knee, his black eyes looking at me reproachfully and piercingly. It is impossible, of course, to say with certainty whether this was the same dog that my ancestors ate in Death Valley, but it is also impossible to prove that this was a completely different being. I recently read about cannibalism during the Siege of Leningrad. Do you know anything about this? He who has once tasted human flesh never again wants to touch anything else.'

Catching my wary expression, Hein began to laugh: 'Wait, don't think anything daft. My ancestors who stayed in Europe were all pastors. They spent all day and all night with the Bible. You couldn't find any people more serious, more steadfast in their convictions in the whole of Holland.'

Like many Dutch people, Donner took a rather ironic attitude towards Holland and had his own thoughts on this subject. 'One can consider a country truly mature,' he said, screwing up his eyes and puffing on his cigarette, as was his wont, 'if it has been through both world wars of the 20th century. Countries that haven't been through either of them can't be taken seriously, in Europe this is Switzerland, of course. Countries that have been through only one war, for example Denmark or Holland, can be considered only half mature. So until the end of our days we should be grateful to Germany for occupying us during the last war.'

If we passed fields that had been spread with fresh manure, he would lift his head, breathe in the air and say: 'Holland, Holland, I recognize you, mother Holland!' After one such declaration I asked him: 'Hein, do you actually love Holland?' He screwed up his eyes and ceremonially pronounced: 'Oh, yes, I love Holland.' Once when I began talking about the freedom in Holland and the centuries-long tradition of tolerance in the country, he interrupted me: 'But did you know that just half a century ago Robinson Crusoe could only be published in Holland with considerable cuts by the censor? So, for example, the pages that described the sexual relations between Robinson Crusoe and Friday were omitted? Think about it yourself,' Donner continued, 'how could Robinson spend all his time only teaching Friday English?'

I don't remember what else he said, but recently, rereading Defoe and failing to find the paragraphs that Hein was referring to, I came to the only possible conclusion: that it had been all improvisation by Donner. I think he heard this story from someone, or it came into his head by itself, then, liking it, he told it once, and again, then he stopped wondering whether it was true or the fruit of his imagination; and it didn't matter – he said it was so!

Another time the conversation turned to poetry. 'Poetry, what is it?' he inquired rhetorically. 'We Dutch have no world class poets. It's not even because of the language, it's just that our approach to life is too rational. Artists are another matter. Here we

have a representation of life. But poetry – what's it for?' Once, walking through the centre of Amsterdam with him and noticing the neglected Royal Palace on the Dam, I asked if anyone lived in it. 'No,' Hein replied, 'and no one has lived there for a long time, so when I came to Amsterdam just after the war and had problems finding somewhere to live, I wrote to the queen, asking if I could temporarily stay in the palace until I found somewhere suitable. And what do you think? I got a reply, very polite I should add, from her secretary. We are very sorry, Mr Donner, but we can't help you...'

In the summer of 1976 he asked me: 'By the way, how's your naturalization going? Did you get your Dutch passport?' 'No,' I replied, 'you know very well, you can only put in a request to the queen after five years, and then it takes a good year or two to go through the whole process. This autumn I'll only have been here four years.' He thought for a while and shook the ash from his cigarette. 'You know what? My Mariannetje (Donner's wife – G.S.) works in the office of the mayor of Amsterdam. I'll ask her if she can move your papers from one pile to another.' I don't know if this played a real role, but a few months later I received an official announcement, published in the newspaper *Staatscourant*, where on the list of names of new Dutch citizens I found my own.

An original person is often a banal writer. The opposite may also be true. The same can be said about chess players. The epitome of a bourgeois storyteller, full of surprising tales, sharp of tongue and quick to react in conversation, Donner, it would seem, should have been a sharp, combinational chess player. Nothing of the sort. If in life, literature and everything else he was attracted by paradoxes and extraordinary, often contradictory opinions, in chess Donner firmly followed the rules he had learned once and for all. He brought to the game the dogmatism that he had absorbed during his Protestant childhood and youth in The Hague. I think he studied chess in the same way that he had once studied the Bible, logically, thoughtfully and intensively, taking

in all its canons: the Ten Commandments, the advantage of the bishop pair, the Gospel according to Matthew, the minority attack. Perhaps this is why he read very slowly, but then one day what he read would stick in his memory as if it had been carved into it.

It was no coincidence then, that in Tim Krabbé's large collection of short games lost by Donner, there are some that are completely identical, repeating each other right up to the last move: he simply couldn't stray from the beaten track. Donner's reaction to this publication? 'Tim, I hope you didn't forget those three games against Van den Berg, which I lost in 21 moves?' I happened to be an eye-witness to one such short game when I was playing next to him at the Buenos Aires Olympiad in 1978. In the Holland-China match Donner lost, not getting out of the opening, but falling under a crushing attack that concluded with a successful queen sacrifice. Having resigned the game to an excitedly gesticulating Chinese player who was jabbering about something, he remained motionless for a while, looking at the position where checkmate had become inevitable, then suddenly jumped up and announced: 'Now I will be the Chinese Kieseritzky! My name will be immortal in China! And when they organise a chess tournament in Peking, I, not you, will be invited to it,' he declared jubilantly to Timman and me.

But he had a well-developed positional sense and excellent endgame technique, with infinite faith in the bishop pair and the ability to use it. In one of our ten games I lost in an endgame where he masterfully exploited the advantage of the bishop pair. When he walked around while his opponent was thinking about his move, he looked like a tiger hunting at night. His gait changed, he moved slowly, stretching his head out forward a little, stopping only by an ashtray to tap his cigarette on it with his yellow, nicotine-stained fingers – the mass campaign of terror against smokers was still a long way off, and there were always clouds of smoke in tournament halls. I tried talking to him a few times during a game, but he replied reluctantly, staring straight through me, and I understood that during games he preferred to be in the world of the wooden pieces.

This was very characteristic of him: colossal concentration while playing and total immersion in his thoughts, in the game. He had another feature that was absolutely essential for victory, it seems to me. This was confidence in his choice of plan or manoeuvre and decisiveness in implementing it.

'This has to work,' Donner would say, 'it has to work, damn it.' It stands to reason that this persistence, this stubbornness in the evaluation of a position, in defence of his ideas, very often didn't correspond with the actual state of affairs on the board, but it was still better than doubts, a weak will and constantly beating oneself up, so common among timid souls, thinking: why, oh why didn't I castle on the last move?

In 1970 Donner took part in a very strong tournament in Holland. Spassky, the reigning world champion, Botvinnik and Larsen also played in it. The tournament took place over four rounds and Donner was considered the clear outsider. Berry Withuis recalls that before the start of the first round Donner's mood was far from serene. 'Who have I got mixed up with?' he exclaimed, 'Botvinnik! Spassky! World champions! And Larsen? Also a champion!' But Donner controlled his nerves and demonstrated his best qualities – scoring 50 percent of the possible points, he took outright second place. Closing the tournament, Max Euwe said: 'Yesterday we had Feyenoord (the Dutch football club had just won the European Cup – G.S.), today we honour Donner!'

I only saw the Donner of the sixties in photographs, but they confirm the general impression that Hein looked very young then, with a pink, chubby, almost babyish face, he looked like an overgrown child with the body of a Falstaff. At the entrance to a nightclub in Santa Monica which Donner had gone to with Bent Larsen, he was stopped: minors weren't allowed in. 'Yes, but I'm already 39,' Donner began justifying himself, and he was allowed in, on Larsen's word, only because the flabbergasted doorman remarked that when people claimed to be older than they were, they didn't do it by such a margin.

He had already begun to get noticeably rounder then, and by the time I met him he had turned into a colossus with bags un-

der his mischievous, child-like eyes, a beard that was going slightly grey and a decent-sized stomach – the overall impression resembled some Roman emperor. I remember how, looking at the very young, skinny, cherubic Jan Timman, he predicted for him the same rotund form that he himself had developed. It all came true. Many things that Donner said were forgotten, lost, outdated or proven false. But many things also came true.

Before the Haifa Olympiad in 1976 there was a group training session for the first time in the history of Dutch chess. Sporting goods companies supplied us with T-shirts, bags, tracksuits and trainers. When the chess players came out onto the football field one day, the journalists devoted numerous column inches to it, and photographers and TV cameramen immortalized the event on film. Donner, who said once that the only kind of sport he liked was conversation, stood on the side with a cigarette in his mouth during the filming. Afterwards he described the event: 'To emphasize our determination and team unity that was forged in these days, I used the pronoun 'we', but anyone who knows me will understand, of course, how abhorrent this commercial invasion was for me; I can't stand football and in the depths of my soul I believe that chess is superior to any physical sport, even if, bearing in mind the subsidy that the chess federation has received from the ministry responsible for sport, I shouldn't proclaim this so loudly.'

The Dutch team flew into Israel for that Olympiad very late at night and the organisers suggested that we stay over in a hotel in Herzeliya, so we could leave for Haifa early in the morning. The hotel was full and we had to spend these few hours in double rooms. 'Listen, Hans,' Donner said when he found himself sharing a room with Ree, 'believe me, I have nothing against you personally, but I've never in my life yet shared a hotel room with a man, so excuse me...' The next morning some tourists who were leaving for an early excursion stared with bewilderment at the large, unshaven man sleeping in the hotel lobby, with arms that were almost touching the floor and the face and hairstyle of the Emperor Claudius, who had unexpectedly arrived in the Holy Land.

In Haifa I listened to his long monologue about the laws and customs of the ancient country, about Professor Leibovitch, a well-known troublemaker in Jewish studies who claimed that the Western Wall was just a pile of rocks that had been left there by a misunderstood king. 'Can you imagine,' Donner exclaimed, 'having the audacity to suggest this in Israel?' I interrupted him with a question. 'Hein, where does the tradition of rocking back and forth during prayer come from? Isn't there something sexual in this?' Hein looked at me with pleasure, and it was clear that he liked my question. 'No way', Donner thought for a second, 'No way. This tradition arose thousands of years ago when the Jews were wandering through the desert, riding camels, and they didn't have time to get down on the ground, so the prayers were synchronised with the animals' steps.' When I told this story to an acquaintance who is an expert on Judaism, he remarked: 'It's rubbish, of course. But how original!' and tut tutted, appreciating the grandmaster's fantasy.

In Israel during an excursion to Jerusalem Donner was our guide and tour leader around the places that he knew very well from his youth in The Hague. At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where Jesus reputedly lies buried, he pointed to a stone on which the Roman legionnaires had played dice to divide up His clothes, and he advised us to light a candle in the church, as the soldiers had actually been chess players, of course, but they just hadn't had a board handy. His attitude towards religion was unambiguous. 'Repeat after me: there is no God,' Hein declared, addressing a young woman who had carelessly admitted to him that she was a believer, 'No God!' True, this took place at about three in the morning after he had drunk a considerable quantity of rum and Coke.

The Dutch team came second at that Olympiad in Haifa, only half a point behind the winners, the Americans. Timman and I won on first and second board respectively, but in a very important game with Kavalek I couldn't manage to convert a large advantage into a win. 'I want to cry when I look at your endgame technique,' Hein remarked, watching the game from the side, 'I

have the impression that at the elite KGB school where they prepared you for your emigration to the West, all endings experts were repressed during the Great Terror, and there was no one to fill in your blank spots in this part of the game.'

After the closing ceremony we saw a joyful Donner in the foyer of the hotel. 'Guys,' Hein said, 'some local collector here buys gold and silver medals. He'll give two thousand dollars for a gold medal, and five hundred for our silver medals. All the Americans have already sold these trinkets, and I've just got rid of my own.' He didn't receive any support from members of the Dutch team. Whether sentimental considerations played a role here or, on the contrary, financial ones – the same collector would offer a high price in ten years' time – I don't remember, but no one followed Donner's example.

Gradually Donner withdrew from chess, and more frequently the names of the new generation of heroes would mean nothing to him. 'Listen,' Donner asked, pointing to some young grandmaster, 'that guy there, can he really play?' Writing was what he wanted to do now. He always wanted that. He was first published in 1953, and we can find words in that piece that already remind us of the later Donner: 'It's not the strongest who wins, nor he who understands the game better objectively, nor the philosopher, but the harsh, determined warrior, exactly as in life.'

His first articles appeared in a magazine that was published by the DD club in The Hague, for which he played for many years. Here is the commentary from one of his games, very typical Donner style: 'The position which had arisen on the board should have been resigned by any self-respecting player. My opponent did not do this and in the end he managed to obtain a draw, and I am so ashamed of this that I will spare the reader and not give you the remaining moves.'

When he played abroad, he sent back reports on tournaments which he had participated in to newspapers and magazines. Almost all grandmasters did this in the 19th century and up to the '60s and '70s of the last century: they played in tournaments and wrote about them. Donner considered that the forefather of the



chess journalist was an Arab player called Abu-Bakr Mohammad ben Yahya as-Suli, who lived in the 10th century and 'left detailed accounts of his travels, and of his opponents at the chess board, whom he crushed. These notes, in which the element of false modesty is completely absent, are full of absolutely unbelievable anecdotes and tales, which he rewrote from other sources with appalling mistakes, and this anthologist and falsifier, to put it bluntly, was the first chess journalist.'

It would be wrong to say that Donner always accurately fulfilled his journalistic duties – he was too much of a chess player for this, and a phrase from one of his newspaper articles explains everything: 'The attentive reader of my reports has noticed, most likely, that news from the tournament ceased abruptly at the end of last week. Anyone who looked at the tournament results section probably understood the reason for this. Indeed, against the Israeli Kagan and also against the Austrian Hölzl I was forced to submit to heavy defeats.'

In his stories one nearly always encounters archaic or old church words and expressions weaved into the chess canvas, borrowed from the Old and New Testament – without doubt a consequence of his youth in The Hague. Very often they seem like a long monologue, spoken for only one listener, or like a personal letter. What is lost to the reader are his facial expressions, his gestures and his intonations. It would be wrong to think that his reports were always careless and full of humour. Often his pen was what in their time the stylus was in the hands of the Romans – a steel, sharp-tipped pencil for letters and for murder, and there were quite a few people who couldn't hear the name Donner without gnashing their teeth. He frequently dipped his pen in poison and irony, and there were few in the chess world who hadn't felt this irony aimed at them. Only Euwe always remained for him 'Grand Maître, the All-Powerful and Great'.

A few months before Euwe's death, Donner went with him on an official visit to Jordan. At a royal reception the two tall Dutchmen were visible from a long way off, Euwe in a white tuxedo

and Donner in a black one. Along with simultaneous exhibitions they also had to play a demonstration game. Before the start of the game, Euwe wanted to 'discuss' it with his opponent, as is often done in these cases, but Donner forestalled him: 'Ah, Grand Maître, the Great and All-Powerful, even if I wanted to, I simply couldn't win a game against you.' In the course of their lives they had played quite a few games with each other, but Donner hadn't once managed to beat Euwe.

Donner has written several chess books; one of them was on an endgame which he decided to solve – two knights against a pawn – one of the most complicated endgames. He was so keen on this topic at the time that he only talked about the squares on which the pawn had to be blockaded. He constantly used the name Trotsky, and although I corrected him, pointing out that the well-known study composer who did a great deal of analysis on this rare ending had nothing in common with the leader of the October Revolution, Donner didn't pay much attention to my remarks.

The expression 'he'd say something for effect at the expense of his own father' could have been dreamt up for him, but on one occasion it was particularly appropriate. 'I'm in a hurry, I'm in a hurry,' Donner muttered without stopping when I met him on February 2, 1981 at Amsterdam's Central Station, 'My father just died in The Hague and –' here he took a breath so that I could appreciate the rest of the sentence, 'can you imagine, the old man didn't survive the last six hours before his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, just six hours...' and, striking a light, he strode off to the The Hague platform.

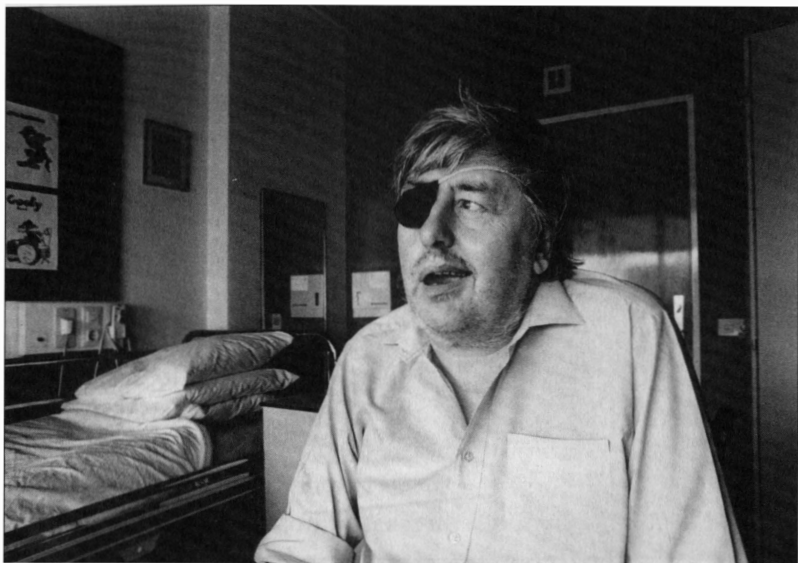
He asked me once: 'You're aware that there are pre-written obituaries for famous people in newspaper offices even while they're alive? I know they have an obituary for me, too. Ah, there's only one of me, and when I die, there won't be another. You know all the great men in history were known by just their first name – Rembrandt, Leonardo, Michelangelo. When I die, they'll call me Hein, just Hein, and everyone will know who they mean,' and, craning his neck, he imitated laughter, 'ha, ha, ha...'



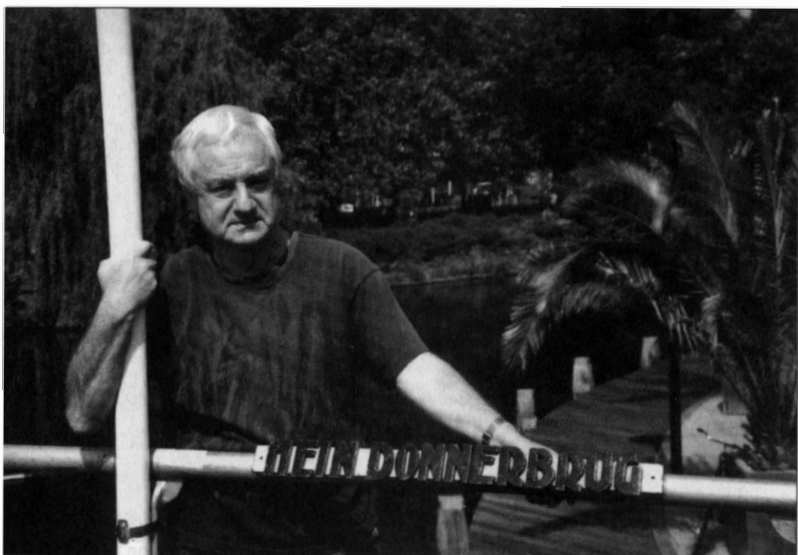
Hein Donner in the 1950s. He always looked much younger than his age.



Hein Donner with his father, who was Minister of Justice and, later on, President of the Supreme Council in Holland: 'My father strictly forbade me to publish my thoughts about atheistic Christianity while he was alive.'



Donner after his severe stroke, with a bandage on one eye: 'I am one hundred percent disabled and one hundred percent a normal person.'



The bridge near the Max Euweplein right in the centre of Amsterdam was named after Hein Donner.

Fate had endowed him with talent and health free of charge; he developed his talents, but his health suffered prolonged and systematic destruction. The irregularities began in 1982, precisely one day before his trip to Spain for the Zonal tournament. The doctor in Amsterdam called it a mild flu after a brief examination, but over there, in Marbella, the local doctor gave a completely different diagnosis. With a heavy head and constant tiredness, Donner nevertheless decided to start the tournament. When it became completely unbearable, he decided to take an extreme measure. Donner: 'I resorted to the strongest medicine I knew, a panacea for all physical and psychological illnesses. The impossible and the indescribable. I gave up smoking.' But that didn't help much. He began having problems with movement and coordination and, although he continued to joke: 'The waiters in the hotel know me as 'that Dane from room 801, who's already drunk at breakfast time'', his condition was too serious for jokes.

He didn't want to give in, but he finished with a minus score in the Dutch Championship and the OHRA Tournament in Amsterdam. Several times while he was taking walks with his daughter in Vondel Park he lost consciousness and Marian – Donner's daughter from his second marriage – had to run home for help. The doctors insisted on an operation, but Hein wasn't used to listening to anyone, least of all doctors. A misfortune occurred on August 23, 1983. His brain haemorrhage was so severe that for a while the doctors feared for his life. They managed to save him, but he could neither speak nor walk any more, swallowed with great difficulty, became deaf in one ear and had double vision.

His period of convalescence lasted for more than a year. This huge man had to learn how to walk and talk again, like a child. Speech partially came back to him, but he couldn't manage to regain control over his body, and he could only move around with the aid of a wheelchair. He couldn't hope for future improvement. 'It's completely useless to wish me to get better,' he said to anyone who repeated the set phrase. He needed constant care and until the end of his life Donner had to live in a home popu-

lated with other disabled people, the majority of whom were much older than him. For the first time since his long ago The Hague period he got some structure in his life, but he paid a terrible price for it.

He couldn't read any more. Previously he had always written with a pen, but now he couldn't do this, and after a great deal of practice he learned to type with one finger. He began with the simplest words, but even these demanded incredible effort from him. One of his first exercises was called *Ode to My Typing Teacher*. Here it is: 'house house house house window window window window tree tree tree tree four four four four heart heart heart heart flame flame flame flame'. 'My world has become very small now, but a chess player is used to that,' he tapped out.

He began writing a weekly column in one of the most prestigious Dutch newspapers. In these short essays he wrote about old age and the destruction of the organism, and about the senility of the residents of the home.

These were the touching stories in which he described the situation he found himself in very candidly, but without a trace of sentimentality. 'I am probably the only person in the world who is sitting in an old people's home and writing for the newspaper. I am one hundred percent disabled and one hundred percent a normal person. It's a problem that drives the nurses in this home mad,' Donner wrote. The short essay-sketches were published in a book called *Written after My Death*, which won the literary prize for the year.

The impressive volume of his best chess articles came out a year before his death and he attended a presentation of his book in a wheelchair, with a bandage over one eye, at the Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum. The title of this book was *The King* and the first copy was handed to Donner by his old friend Harry Mulisch, who concluded his speech with the words: 'The gods have thrown a lump of marble at your head. Although you haven't managed to recover completely, they haven't managed to destroy you either. You have become a moral example for all of us. I

know what I always saw in you: a man who conquered his own body. I understand now why this book is called *The King*. The king on the cover is you, Hein!' At first glance this book is about chess and chess players: here and there one encounters diagrams and moves in chess notation, which would seem to confirm this. In actual fact the book is a brilliant, self-deprecating self-portrait of a fearless and cheerful man, for whom chess was not a surrogate for human relations, but the emotions of life transferred to the black-and-white board.

On the fifth floor there is a big hall full of wheelchairs. The people sitting in them stare at one spot, more often they sleep, with their heads leaning to the side, or less often they read. If you walk a little further down the corridor you'll come to Hein's room.

It sounds terrible – I know – but I like being here. When you leave, you understand that your own problems are relative; just an hour ago they seemed so important, but they go away somewhere, shrinking to the size of a thimble. All your cares seem to be washed away and – this is how people are – something resembling a feeling of happiness arises from the depths of your soul: but we're alive. We're alive and we can just walk down the street and look at the clouds, and we have everything, by comparison with the residents of the home that we just left. Everything.

He sleeps a lot, and in the evenings he watches television. Every week he taps out his column. Often he simply looks at the street; sometimes, through the window opposite he sees Mrs Euwe: this is the flat in which the former world champion lived his last twenty years. Mrs Euwe once wrote him a letter in which she advised him in his current condition to consider Christianity. His reply was short: 'Dear Mrs Euwe, you are right, but God doesn't exist.'

The door to his room is open, and now he is alone in his wheelchair. He has a black patch on his eye, otherwise everything he looks at appears in duplicate. This makes him resemble

an old pirate. On the table there is a chess set and a half-eaten chocolate bar. I deliver another one. We greet each other. He talks with difficulty. His speech reminds me of a worn gramophone record that also sticks from time to time. 'Yy-ou... pp-layed... bb-adly... Wij-Kkaan... Zee... thh-is... yy-ear,' he says straight away. 'What did you say?' 'You... pplayed... bb-adly... at... Wijk-Kkaan-Zee thhis yyear,' he repeats. 'What? What are you saying?' Hein strains: 'Yyou played-badly at... Wijk aan Zee thhis yyear.' 'I don't understand anything.' Hein laughs and waves his hand at me. Sometimes during a visit he suddenly says sharply: 'Now I will eat.' This means that your visit is over and you can go – Hein preferred to eat alone because any physical process was difficult for him.

Sentenced to indefinite imprisonment in the shell of his body that had holes in many places, he never complained. Not only because complaining is asking questions and waiting for an answer, and he was used to answering questions, not asking them, but also because he knew perfectly well that in his condition there were no answers to these questions. His chaos and the complete neglect of the non-spiritual, material form of human existence had turned into complete dependence on this form, but he didn't want this to be exhibited for general viewing, and the last thing he needed was sympathy.

We talk about chess news. He knows about the latest events. Berry Withuis, his regular colleague at simultaneous exhibitions and partner in innumerable games of blitz, comes to see him every Saturday with bulletins from the latest tournaments. A month ago Withuis decided to joke around and began playing through the games from the semi-final of the national women's championships. 'What kind of patzers are these?' Donner asked, uninterested in the chaff. I start showing him my game against Nigel Short from the Hoogoven Tournament. 'You can play that way?' Hein criticises my opening. We leave the chess alone. It is beginning to get dark.

'I often have dreams now. Recently I dreamt that I could walk again, and they had to tie me to the bed to prevent a misfortune.



I've been buried alive in this nursing home. This is my last refuge... Mulisch says that I can live for decades longer in this condition. Highly unlikely. I fully realise that I am in the last stage of my life. Another year, or two at best. I used to smoke more than 100 cigarettes a day. It's a bit of a shame that I gave up smoking in '82, because now I could give up any day. I remember I was playing Miles once. When my smoke blew in his direction he waved his hands to disperse the tobacco cloud. I immediately called the arbiter: 'Mr Miles is distracting me, could you tell him to stop doing it.' Now I myself am against smoking. Smoking should be banned. Alcohol too, of course; I liked alcohol, but after the age of 50 a man shouldn't drink much. Now I even have trouble drinking water.

'My father strictly forbade me to publish my thoughts about atheistic Christianity while he was alive. Although, of course, the idea of atheism is terrible in itself, if it's true. I don't want to reach the age of my father. Back then I thought I'd also live as long as him, but now I'm satisfied with 59. First 59, then 60; at 60, I think, I can die peacefully...

'My physiotherapist says to me, hold the beam firmly, I'm letting you go. If you remember that I'm not with you, you could fall. This is the right mentality. My whole body is covered with bruises from falls, but this is the best way to learn something. Of course, you have to be careful not to break anything.

'I want to be buried, not cremated. I've decided this a long time ago. Sometimes I imagine a priest coming to see me just before I die. In this home there are Catholic rites, but have they really decided on this? No, they know me well enough here... Before the end a man clings on to life. Sartre died like a dog. He was blind and incontinent, and he hid bottles of whisky everywhere. Simone de Beauvoir couldn't watch all this, but he himself said in one of his last interviews: 'For some reason that isn't clear to me, I don't feel unhappy.' '

On the morning of November 27, 1988, Hein's sister congratulated him, as was always done in the family on that day. 'What are you congratulating me on?' he asked. 'What do you mean,

Apart from the previously unpublished 'Genna Adonis' and 'The Stairway of Life', all articles in this book were originally published in New In Chess Magazine.